PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 337

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1998–99

COMPRISING PERIOD
1 November—11 November 1999

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1 November 1999

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 337**

FIFTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1998–99

House of Commons

Monday 1 November 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BAXI PARTNERSHIP LIMITED TRUSTS BILL [*Lords*]

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the Baxi Partnership Limited Trusts Bill *[Lords]* shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

Ordered,

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the next Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the present Session;

Ordered,

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office that such a declaration has been so deposited has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

Ordered,

That no Petitions against the Bill having been presented within the time limited during the present Session, no Petitioners shall be heard before any committee on the Bill save those who complain of any amendment as proposed in the filled up Bill or of any matter which arises during the progress of the Bill before the committee;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

Ordered,

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—[*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them forthwith.

TRANSPORT SALARIED STAFFS' ASSOCIATION (AMENDMENT OF RULES) BILL

Ordered,

That so much of the Lords Message [28th October] as relates to the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (Amendment of Rules) Bill be now considered.

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (Amendment of Rules) Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

Ordered,

That on the fifth day on which the House sits in the next Session the Bill shall be presented to the House;

Ordered,

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the present Session;

Ordered,

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first, second and third time and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

Ordered,

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—[*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them forthwith.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Fireworks

1. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): How many incidents which involve fireworks have been reported to the police in each year since 1995; and if he will make a statement. [94990]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Separate figures are not kept on firework incidents reported to the police. Most such incidents will be reported to the ambulance service in the first instance. In 1998, 831 people were reported as treated by hospitals for injuries caused by accidents with fireworks. That compares with 908 people in 1997, 1,233 in 1996 and 1,530 in 1995.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. Obviously, the figures are pointing in the right direction, although 800-odd too many people were injured last year.

Let me say first that I am not anti-fireworks; I want people to enjoy them, but I am concerned at the number of injuries that they cause. Does my hon. Friend have any figures for incidents reported to the police involving fireworks thrown in the street? My concerns are heightened because of the millennium celebrations that will be taking place. The regulations on fireworks safety must be strengthened, and people must adhere to them. Will the Minister assure my constituents that those regulations will be observed?

Mrs. Roche: I am sure that the whole House would endorse the sentiments behind my hon. Friend's remarks. All fireworks intended for use by the public, whether made here or imported, must meet the requirements of the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997, which are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. However, the Home Office takes very seriously any infringement of the regulations and criminal activities. Bonfire night should be enjoyed, but enjoyed peacefully and safely.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I do not know whether the Minister knows that I have a retail business in Swansea. We have been selling fireworks for many years, and it is not always easy to guess someone's age. Will the hon. Lady remind shopkeepers that they should never gamble when it comes to the sale of such explosives? It is best to err on the side of caution and not to sell the fireworks. Will the hon. Lady also confirm that people who may be enticed into buying fireworks for others who are under age will be pursued if they do so? In general, safety should come first and—I know that this will not make me popular with other shopkeepers—people should buy their fireworks late so that they do not hang around in the house and possibly cause damage.

Mrs. Roche: I am entirely in agreement with the hon. Gentleman. I know about his business interests because of my previous experience at the Department of Trade and Industry. He has spoken a great deal of common sense. I would add that there are some very good public fireworks displays to which parents can take their children. Indeed, this Saturday there is a magnificent fireworks display at Alexandra palace, in my constituency, and I will be there with my family.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South–East): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Tories, led by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), talking out a private Member's fireworks Bill was an act of gross irresponsibility? If the Bill had been enacted, newspapers such as my local *Bolton Evening News* would not be calling today for increased safety and even a total ban on retail sales of fireworks.

Mrs. Roche: It is the duty of all Members of the House to consider each piece of legislation that comes before us. That was indeed an important measure; instead of seeking to talk out Bills, Members should seriously consider their implications. Many people will echo my hon. Friend's remarks.

Avon and Somerset Police

2. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What was the change in the number of police officers in the Avon and Somerset constabulary between March 1996 and March 1999. [94991]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): Between March 1996 and March 1999, the number of police officers in Avon and Somerset increased by 18, to 2,999. The chief constable and police authority can apply for a share of the Government's new crime-fighting fund to provide 5,000 extra police recruits over the next three years. We will publish detailed guidance on that shortly.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the Minister. Does he know that, as long as 10 years ago, I went with the then chief constable to the then Home Secretary to argue for an extra 300 officers for Avon and Somerset, simply to bring us back to the point where we should have been? Does he accept that the change from limiting numbers to limiting cash has produced little benefit for police authorities? Can he give me an absolute assurance that the number of police officers available to police Somerset and the streets of Bristol at the end of this Parliament will be greater than in 1996?

Mr. Clarke: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman goes back 10 years. As he well knows, over the five years from March 1992 to March 1997, the number of police officers

in Avon and Somerset fell by 92 under the previous Government. I confirm that money will be available for the police authority in Avon and Somerset to bid for new recruits. We hope and expect that that will lead to more police officers on the ground there.

Fireworks

3. **Ms Hazel Blears** (Salford): What action he is taking to prevent the deliberate use of fireworks to cause alarm, distress and injury to people and damage to property. [94992]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The law relating to criminal damage and to offences against the person applies to deliberate damage by fireworks, as it would to damage deliberately caused in other ways. In addition, the letting off of fireworks in any public place is an offence under section 80 of the Explosives Act 1875.

Ms Blears: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, but I am not satisfied that the regulations relating to fireworks are being enforced. There have been some horrific incidents in my constituency in the past few weeks. Youngsters aged nine, 10 and 11 have been putting explosives into car exhausts or down grids to blow them up. The latest trick is to put an explosive inside a traffic cone and then put the cone inside a telephone box. When it explodes, the whole telephone box goes up. That is not youngsters having fun but people terrorising the neighbourhood. I ask the Government to consider seriously the enforcement of the regulations and to ensure that magistrates take such offenders seriously.

Mrs. Roche: I am well aware of the problems that my hon. Friend has experienced in her constituency and of the detailed, firm action that she has taken. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has visited her constituency. Among other things, the regulations prohibit the sale of aerial shells, bangers and mini-rockets to the general public and place restrictions on the size of fireworks that can be sold generally. I know that she has been in contact with my colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry. I undertake to liaise with them to see what can be done. We are talking about criminality and it will be dealt with by the police. I hope that it will be investigated and arrests made.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful for the Minister's initial response to the question, and agree fervently with it. However, in view of the parliamentary answer provided by the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) to the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on 25 March, and of the 23 per cent. and 12 per cent. reductions in accidents caused by firework hooliganism in 1997 and 1998 respectively, will she confirm that the Government have no further plans for additional restrictions on the use of fireworks?

Mrs. Roche: I have made it clear that the regulations are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that, as I told my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), we are talking about criminal activity. We do not want the enjoyment of the many spoiled by the reckless and criminal activity of the few. The Government must keep the position under constant review. The House would expect no less.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I am glad to hear that my hon. Friend is liaising with the DTI. In those discussions, will she raise the fact that fireworks are on sale for so long before 5 November that that in itself contributes to much of the harm and damage that is done? Will she consider the possibility of restricting sales of fireworks to individuals to a short period before 5 November, to minimise the chances of crimes occurring?

Mrs. Roche: My hon. Friend's point is well made and I will make it to the DTI. It is important that the DTI has regular detailed discussions with the industry and representative bodies to ensure that such points are taken on board.

Police Retirement Rates

4. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What representations he has received on retirement rates of police officers over the next three years. [94993]

10. **Mr. Edward Garnier** (Harborough): What estimate he has made of the number of police officers who will leave the police service over the next three years. [94999]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): While I am not aware of receiving any formal representations on the retirement rates of police officers over the next three years, I frequently discuss aspects of this issue with the police associations.

Given the uncertainty as to the number of officers who take early retirement on medical grounds, or who leave the service before normal retirement age for other reasons, precise projections of wastage of police officers in the future are very difficult to make. The number of officers who left the service during the past three years for any reason was about 17,000.

Hon. Members will want to be aware of papers and calculations that I presented to the Select Committee on Home Affairs on Tuesday last. Those suggest that the police service was likely to recruit 15,000 officers over the next three years, to which the 5,000 recruits to be funded from the crime-fighting fund would be additional.

Mr. Amess: When the Home Secretary announced 5,000 extra recruits, despite contrary advice from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, why did he not even touch on the subject of the retirement of police officers, so that the general public could receive an accurate picture? Is the Home Secretary aware that the residents of my constituency of Southend, West think that he is soft on crime because he does not provide enough police officers to fight crime?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): What happened to Basildon?

Mr. Straw: It was a Labour gain. I wish the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) well in my home county.

My speech to the Labour party conference was entirely accurate as to the effect of the 5,000 officers being additional—the inaccuracy was that the baseline information that I provided was 4,000 too low. *[Interruption.]* I understand why Conservative Members are laughing—their fox has been shot. The simple truth is that, during the past three years, wastage has been running at 17,000, and the overall effect of the figures that I have now accurately presented is that there should be 20,000 additional recruits over the next three years. The effect of that should be that overall police numbers increase.

I acknowledge that, for reasons related to the police funding formula, Essex police have done less well than have some other forces. However, I hope that—not least because of that—the chief constable and the police authority of Essex will apply for the additional new money that is available under the crimefighting fund.

Mr. Garnier: Let us have it straight from the Home Secretary. By the end of this Parliament, will there be more or fewer police officers than there were at its beginning?

Mr. Straw: I hope very much that there will be more. However, I remind the hon. and learned Gentleman, and all on the Conservative Benches who were Members of the House before 2 May 1997, that under an Act for which they voted, but which we voted against, the power of the Home Secretary to set police numbers was removed by law.

I further remind the hon. and learned Gentleman—I hope that he makes this point in his constituency—that we are providing extra new money, next year: £35 million over and above the comprehensive spending review. We shall provide further new money in the following year. The money on which those sums are based was money that he and his colleagues damned as being reckless and irresponsible. Hon. Members cannot have it both ways—saying in their constituencies that expenditure on the police should rise, while voting in the House for lower police expenditure.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): What progress has my right hon. Friend made to prevent the early retirement of police officers who face disciplinary charges?

Mr. Straw: Under arrangements that I announced last year, and which came into force on 1 April this year, major changes have been made in the overall disciplinary arrangements for police officers. We also expect chief officers—and they have agreed—to enforce a long-standing but rather ignored rule, which required chief officers not to allow any officer to retire through ill health if disciplinary proceedings against him were pending. I am sure that that has the approbation of the whole House.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Is my right hon. Friend prepared to review pension arrangements for officers retiring prematurely due to ill health, who, immediately or subsequently, take up alternative, full-time employment?

Mr. Straw: There is a major issue to do with the way in which the police service conducts its scrutiny of those applying for medical retirement through ill health. We all accept that some police officers who have run into problems of ill health or sickness, or—which is worse—have been injured while on duty, should be retired and should receive a generous pension. However, at present, there are also some officers, who, in each case, have passed medical scrutiny and are retired on ill-health grounds, but who bring the rules into disrepute by taking full-time, remunerative employment straight after their retirement.

We have set clear targets for police forces to reduce the proportion of officers who retire through ill health and I am pleased to say that those targets are working, as are the associated efforts being made by the police service to reduce sickness day by day. The work done in the past year by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to tackle the issue of sickness has released 500 additional officers for front-line operational duties.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): May I pursue the question of police numbers and funding? When answering last week's debate, the Home Secretary said that it was his "wish, hope and expectation" that, from the end of this financial year and for the next three years, there will be more police officers on duty than there would otherwise have been next year. Is he now saying that, taking the number of police officers at the beginning of this Parliament—since when that number has decreased by more than 1,000 in England and Wales—the Government plan that there should be more police officers by the end of the Parliament? Will he also give a commitment, not only that there will be more officers, but that, in real terms and after paying pensions, the allocation of money to local forces to spend on police will increase? In short, will there be more officers and more money in real terms to pay for them?

Mr. Straw: What I said last week was a statement of fact: it is my hope and expectation that there should be more police officers at the end of the three-year period about which we are talking than at the beginning of it. The hon. Gentleman asks me to make a prediction based on the date of the next general election, but that could take place tomorrow, next year or the year after, and it is that which determines the duration of this Parliament. Because of that and because wastage rates are uncertain, I cannot make such a prediction. However, Labour's record will be infinitely better than that of the Conservatives, who, from 1992 to 1997, presided over year-by-year decreases in officer numbers, despite their promise that officer numbers would increase.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Having received from the Home Secretary no satisfactory explanation as to the lines of communication between him and his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, may I ask him to comment on the lines of communication between him and Lord Bassam, who is Under-Secretary of State at the Home Department and who has responsibility for the police? As late as last Thursday, Lord Bassam continued to claim in another place that there would be 11,000 recruits over the next three years, to which 5,000 would

be added, making a total of 16,000, not 20,000 as mentioned by the Home Secretary today. What is going on in the Home Office?

Mr. Straw: It is business as usual in the Home Office—and the right hon. Lady has every reason to know about that. We did not fight the election on a manifesto promising that life would be perfect in the Home Office after 2 May 1997, but I have to say that life there is a lot better than it was before that date. If she wants to exchange numbers on occasional errors, I have to tell her that her score is already far higher than mine. As for the right hon. Lady's question, I had not caught up with the matter to which she refers. However, we all know that the other place is rather old fashioned and that news takes a little time to reach it.

Miss Widdecombe: Do I gather from that that the right hon. Gentleman not only failed to communicate to his Minister the correct state of affairs as he saw it, but that his Minister failed to communicate to him that he had not received that information and had made incorrect statements?

Mr. Straw: If I were at the Dispatch Box in opposition, I would make better use of it than does the right hon. Lady. I have given her an explanation.

Miss Widdecombe: You do not like the facts.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Lady knows that I dislike the fact that there was an error in the original figures I gave, not least because it led to the most outrageous claims that I had tried to mislead the Labour party conference and the public, which I had not done. *[Interruption.]* I have given the facts. Our best estimate was that the police service would recruit at least 15,000 officers in the next five years, but we found new money to allow it to recruit 5,000 additional officers. That contrasts with the false promises of the right hon. Lady who, on 29 January 1997, promised 5,000 extra police officers while presiding over a continual decline in the number of officers. Our additional money will be ring-fenced. As the right hon. Lady has damned the current level of spending on the police service as reckless, does she welcome the additional funding that I have secured from the Treasury?

Miss Widdecombe: I will pass over—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will pass over the right hon. Gentleman's embarrassment about his patent failure to communicate with his Ministers regarding his own announcements, and ask the Home Secretary to comment on the statement of Sir Paul Condon, who said that he

"shared public unease in respect of policing during the state visit of the President of China".

If Sir Paul shares public unease, one must conclude that he did not issue instructions or make suggestions to the police regarding that visit. If the Metropolitan Police Commissioner did not do that, who did?

Mr. Straw: I have already explained to the right hon. Lady, as I did to the Select Committee, that neither I nor any Home Office Minister or—as I have now ascertained—Home Office official was involved in any briefing of the Metropolitan police service before the state visit and the associated demonstrations. I have also made it clear that there was briefing by Foreign Office officials.

I commend the remarks of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, as I fully support the way in which he and his officers policed a very difficult and delicate situation. Once again, the police found themselves, on the one hand, having to ensure the safety of the President of China and his party and of our royal family while, on the other hand, ensuring that they gave proper effect to the right to demonstrate peacefully. I support the Police Commissioner and his officers in their action, and I hope very much that the right hon. Lady does, too.

Leicestershire Police

6. **Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): If he will increase the budget of the Leicestershire police authority; and if he will make a statement. [94995]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): Our plans allow for police expenditure to increase by around 2.8 per cent. in 2000–01. No final decisions have been taken about the allocation of funding to individual forces for the coming financial year. We expect to announce provisional allocations towards the end of the year.

Mr. Tredinnick: I thank the Minister for that reply. Has he had a chance to visit the Leicestershire police authority website? Is he aware that Leicestershire police report that 1998-99 was a more difficult year, that budgets were tighter and that the financial climate remains challenging? What reassurances can the Minister give people in Leicestershire—who are wondering whether existing police levels in the county will be maintained—that there will be an increase in police numbers? Given the controversy about the Home Secretary's announcement at the Labour party conference regarding the so-called 5,000 extra police, will the Minister confirm that it is really magic roundabout money for police that is being diverted from one budget to another? In the real world, we will not see anything like a proper increase in police numbers in Leicestershire.

Mr. Clarke: In the real world, we have announced and allocated real money. I confess that I have not studied the Leicestershire constabulary's website as my focus has been on the "Widdyweb", which is much more interesting and entertaining for a variety of reasons.

The hon. Gentleman will know that the Leicestershire constabulary saw its allocation last year increase by 3.5 per cent.—or £3.6 million—over the previous year, which was well above the national average. Leicestershire had more police officers in March 1998–99 than in March 1997–98, and the number of civilian support staff has also increased. The record in Leicestershire is good, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will pay the Government some credit for that instead of launching whingeing attacks.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Of course, the 10 extra officers were paid for by the increase in funding given by the previous Conservative Government. How will the Leicestershire police pay for the new public safety radio project? What share will the authority receive from the £50 million promised by the Home Secretary a month

ago? Does the Minister agree with the Labour chairman of the West Yorkshire police committee that £50 million is a drop in the ocean compared with the £1.5 billion total cost and the value to the Government of existing radio frequencies? Does he not realise that it is impossible for any police authority, including Leicestershire, sensibly to plan the recruitment of any additional police officers until it knows how the police radios will be paid for?

Mr. Clarke: I am interested to note that today and last week the hon. Gentleman has focused the Conservatives' attack on this major new technological advance—the public safety radio project—which is a critical development that police forces and police authorities throughout the country want and need, and which should have been invested in before. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department announced a couple of weeks ago an extra £50 million, which had not been previously allocated, towards the project. As I said in the debate last week, it is a 15-year project that will receive £1.5 billion over that period. It is wanted, the money is committed, and we shall ensure that every police force in the country has it.

Police Establishment

7. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): If he will make a statement on the size of the police establishment of officers. [94996]

8. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): If he will make a statement on the number of police officers in England. [94997]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I made a full statement of the position on police numbers to the Select Committee on Home Affairs and to this House on Tuesday last, 26 October.

Under legislation passed by the previous Government, the powers of the Home Secretary to set overall police numbers were removed. The Government have allocated money for a crimefighting fund which, among other things, will provide the funding for 5,000 more recruits over and above the number that forces would otherwise have recruited over the next three years, commencing in April 2000. Some £35 million of new money will be available to support this next year, and there will be further funding in the following two years. All this is additional to the comprehensive spending review settlement for policing.

Mr. Viggers: The Home Secretary gave the Labour party conference the impression that there would be more police officers whereas, in fact, numbers are falling. If the right hon. Gentleman did not set out to mislead people, can he explain to us why so many people were misled?

Mr. Straw: What I said at the Labour party conference was entirely accurate. Moreover, if I had failed to provide a baseline—as it turned out a baseline 4,000 too few, which was hardly to my advantage, and very much to my disadvantage—I could justly have been criticised for failing to provide the whole story. I provided a baseline and provided the additional numbers over and above which that baseline would add. The figures for wastage for the previous three years were well known and, as it happens, it is matter of record that the then Liberal Democrat spokesman on the subject, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), pointed that out on the very same day. The only people who were misled were those who—frankly—wanted to be misled, but that was certainly not as a result of what I had said.

The point that the hon. Gentleman needs to bear in mind—I hope that he does and that he tells his constituents about it—is that under his Government, whom he supported in the Lobbies, from 1992–97, despite promises of more police made not least by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald here in January 1997, police numbers fell by 1,500 over that period. It is precisely because of such falls that I was able to negotiate with my very good friends in Her Majesty's Treasury and secure this additional funding, for which I hope that Hampshire, among other forces, will apply.

Mr. Burns: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that during the last general election the West Chelmsford Labour party mouthed the slogan, "Everybody wants more bobbies on the beat"? As a fellow Essex man, has he noticed that in the last full year for which figures are available the number of police officers in Essex fell by 37, from 2,928 to 2,891? Could he tell me and my constituents in which year he expects the number of police officers in Essex to be the same as it was when we left office, and when he expects it to be higher than when we left office?

Mr. Straw: I understand why the hon. Gentleman is asking the question, but, for reasons that he fully understands, I cannot give him that answer. He voted in 1994 to take away the power of the Home Secretary to set overall police establishments. As it happens, I voted against that. The matter—genuinely within available resources—is one for chief constables and the police authorities.

As I said to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), I accept that, for no other reason but the way in which the formula operates—it grieves me, as it concerns my home county—Essex has done less well than the average. As a result, I very much hope that Essex makes a good bid for additional funding from the crime-fighting fund for next year and the year after.

I should make another point about the West Chelmsford Labour party, although I do not carry all its incantations in my head—despite my affection for the constituents of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). Yes, we said that we would take measures to release more officers for operational duties, and that is precisely what we are doing through, for example, efficiency savings in early retirement and sickness arrangements, and the management of back-office arrangements. As a result of very good work by police authorities and chief constables, many more officers, in a great many forces, within the total, which may remain level, have been released for front-line operational duties.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Am I right in recalling that when the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) was a member of the previous Government, crime doubled? Does the Home Secretary share my view that she and her colleagues give the impression that they will not be satisfied until half the population are in prison and the other half are in the police force? Although police numbers are important, do not members of the public want

a success made of crime partnerships, which involve councils, the police and community and business organisations, so that crime can be tackled from the streets where they live and not from some police service headquarters?

Mr. Straw: As ever, my hon. Friend's memory is perfect. He is entirely right to recall a fact that Opposition Members are trying to excise from the national memory: under the Conservatives, crime doubled.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Crime fell.

Mr. Straw: The way in which the Conservatives produce such smoke and mirrors—if I may coin a phrase—is by picking on different dates. Crime doubled under the Conservatives, and it is one of the many reasons why it will be decades before the British public ever show the confidence to vote for them again.

My hon. Friend is right about the importance of the crime partnerships. Many police chiefs say to me that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is one of the best ever pieces of legislation to come their way. In the west midlands, where I was this morning, there is tangible evidence of the effectiveness of such partnerships—in Sandwell, Dudley, Wolverhampton, Coventry, of course, and Birmingham. The best evidence of how an imaginative chief constable has been able to put more officers on front-line operational duties is in the west midlands, where Ted Crewe, the chief constable, has released 700 officers from back-office headquarters jobs for front-line operational duties. I wish that Opposition Members would start applauding such innovation.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend's constituency is just a few miles away from mine, and is served by the same Lancashire constabulary. I am sure that he will know that the *Burnley Express* is running a campaign—"More Bobbies for Burnley"—based on what it calls my right hon. Friend's impressive speech, which it was, at the Labour party conference. Will he respond positively to that? Will he give an assurance that the Dordrecht initiative, which has been supported by the Home Office in Burnley and has had a massive effect in reducing the level of burglaries and robberies, will continue to enjoy his Department's support?

Mr. Straw: I am always anxious to satisfy my friends from Burnley—both my hon. Friend and, of course, Mr. Alastair Campbell—not least because of what my hon. Friend would say about a certain football team if I did not. I am aware of the importance of the Dordrecht initiative. Such matters must be decided on objective criteria rather than on simply who is, as it were, one's old pal. However, I shall ensure that that application is given very careful consideration.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will the Home Secretary join me in paying tribute to the work of the Sussex police, who continue to do a fine job, albeit with fewer and decreasing resources? Will he acknowledge that, although there are difficulties in calculating exact numbers because of the number of police at Gatwick airport, there is widespread anxiety in the villages, particularly those of Mid-Sussex, that the number of police who are assigned to look after them is gradually falling? Will he give my constituents some hope that that number will increase?

Mr. Straw: I acknowledge the concern of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. It is a truth at all times that there will never be sufficient police officers to satisfy everyone and chief constables have difficult decisions to make about where to put them.

I am aware of what has happened to police numbers in Sussex. I take one period. Between 1995 and 1998, Sussex received a 12.5 per cent. increase in its budget and numbers went down, but numbers have gone up in some forces that had either the same or a lower increase. That is where chief constables' decisions on how to allocate resources make a difference. [HON. MEMBERS: "Blame them."] It is not a question of blaming chief constables, but it is a fact that, since 1994, it is chief constables—of course, within the overall money—who have set the number of officers and the number of civilians, and have made decisions on the use of and expenditure on equipment. If one looks down the table—I would be happy to provide it to the hon. Gentleman—one finds that there are significant variations in how chief officers have used their discretion within the same level of resources.

The pot of money from the crime-fighting fund is not unlimited, but I hope that Sussex, along with other forces, will make an application for additional officers.

Travellers

9. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What plans he has to ensure the effective dispersal of illegal encampments by travellers. [94998]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): The police and local authorities have, under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, all the powers necessary to ensure effective dispersal of illegal encampments by travellers. Those are in addition to the rights of landowners to take civil action through the courts. However, the exercise of those powers is subject to operational guidelines that are issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

The use of such powers in any individual case is an operational matter to be determined by the senior police officer at the scene, but Home Office and Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions guidance makes it clear that such powers can be used at an early stage, where necessary, and recommends an inter-agency approach to deal with problems.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that this summer's remarks by the Home Secretary regarding the behaviour of some travellers were met with a chorus of approval in my constituency, especially in the communities of Beccles and Bungay, where a group of travellers spent four weeks in one public open space? Just when the council was about to complete the civil procedures, they moved and spent another four weeks on a school playing field, leaving piles of rubbish and filth on both sites.

Does my right hon. Friend accept that the public want illegal encampments to be dispersed quickly, and that the civil remedy is not effective in that respect? Will he issue

even stronger guidance to the police to ensure that they use all available legislation to disperse illegal encampments because Suffolk police have said to me that their policy is hardly to use such powers?

Mr. Boateng: The Home Secretary's remarks did strike a chord throughout the country. It is important that everyone should understand that criminal and disorderly behaviour cannot be tolerated, from whatever source it comes. The DETR and the Home Office have made it clear that they expect the powers that are available to the police to be used in a way that reflects that public concern. The Crime and Disorder Act gives the police additional powers.

We are examining whether it is necessary to review the guidance that has been issued by the DETR and the Home Office to strengthen the hand of local authorities and the police. Such anti-social behaviour simply cannot be tolerated; the Government will not tolerate it.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Does the Minister agree that one of the Metropolitan police's problems in dealing with such illegal encampments in the constituency of Uxbridge is the continuing reduction in the resources and manpower of the Metropolitan police Hillingdon division? Therefore, is it not time that the Home Office did something to reassure the law-abiding citizens of the suburbs?

Mr. Boateng: The very reverse is true. Under the previous Administration, the Metropolitan police lost 2,000 police officers. The current Government, however, have made available to the Metropolitan police the resources necessary to cope with illegal encampments. We should recognise the importance of backing police and local authorities in firm action against that type of illegal activity, and the Government have provided that backing across the United Kingdom with a series of seminars promoting good practice. We shall continue to do that, and to provide the police with the resources that they need to tackle the problem. We are providing to the police more resources than they ever received under the previous, Conservative Administration.

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): Is not effective co-operation between the police, local authorities and county councils one important aspect in how we might more effectively resolve the problem? Since the previous Conservative Government withdrew legislation ensuring the availability of legal campsites on which travellers could camp, the problem of illegal encampments has simply grown worse. Will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary take the opportunity to re-examine the guidance, to ensure that local authorities and the police work effectively together on the problem, and that the policy of neighbouring police services is consistent, so that encampments do not move from one county to another?

Mr. Boateng: The previous Conservative Government certainly did nothing to improve the situation. We are ensuring, however, that the type of partnerships that deliver results are encouraged. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 encourages such partnerships. We are also spreading good practice. We have to ensure not only that local authorities and the police work together, but that that work is underpinned by work with the community and local business. Together, we can beat the problem.

Freedom of Information

11. **Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): What recent representations he has received on the Government's proposals for freedom of information. [95000]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The consultation document on freedom of information, published on 24 May 1999, invited comments on the draft legislation. We received a total of 2,248 submissions—all but 400 of which were part of an organised petition on scientific experimentation on animals. None the less, copies of the submissions have been placed in the Library. On 22 October, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the changes that we propose to make to the draft Bill after the consultation period. We shall introduce a Freedom of Information Bill as soon as the legislative timetable allows.

Mr. Kirkwood: Why does the proposed Bill still allow for facts on which policy decisions have been based to remain secret, given, first, that the United Kingdom code of conduct, which the Bill seeks to replace, allows disclosure; secondly, that the Republic of Ireland, in 1997, introduced its own freedom of information legislation allowing disclosure; and, thirdly, and perhaps most extraordinarily of all, that the Home Secretary himself—on 21 July, when he appeared before the Select Committee on Public Administration—said that, on balance, he thought that it was probably right that background and factual information should be made available? Is it not wholly inadequate that we should merely rely on encouraging authorities to use their discretion to make such essential information available?

Mr. O'Brien: Much factual information is already available. The Government have considered with great care the various submissions that have been made, and have introduced a draft Bill that we believe strikes the right balance. Although it is correct to say that, in the past, Governments have been too secretive, the Bill will open up government.

Nevertheless, freedom of information cannot be absolute—there is a tension between balancing interests, such as the individual's right to privacy and the confidentiality of some commercial information that is given to Government. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that up to 60 per cent. of requests for information under United States freedom of information legislation are made by companies seeking to elicit confidential information held by the Government about other companies.

We also have to ensure the good and effective administration of Government, which entails that discussions are held properly within Government. In many cases, however, the background factual information may already be in the public arena or—because of the legislation and the culture of openness that we seek to introduce—may be placed in the public arena by Ministers.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend aware that there has been a jealous clinging to secrecy by every Government this century, and that it is essential that this Government should prove themselves

conclusively different? Will he, please, remember that the Home Secretary has an endearing personal habit of telling the truth, frequently to his own disadvantage, and that that might be an example that it would be very useful for the rest of the Government to follow?

Mr. O'Brien: As my hon. Friend says, my right hon. Friend has a record for being open with the House and bringing forward legislation that makes substantial changes. Nothing in the Bill will prevent the disclosure of any information. We must be clear about that. Exemptions do not necessarily prevent the publication of information. Ministers can decide to publish material covered by an exemption if appropriate. We intend to create a new culture of openness in government. The Bill must be seen in the context of the new statutory right of access to information, the new requirement to consider exercising discretion, new publication schemes and a new information commissioner, who will have strong powers to elicit information from the Government and from other public authorities.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Despite the 21 exemptions in the Bill, does the Minister agree that its purpose is to ensure openness and clarity in government? Does he agree that episodes such as that which happened this morning, when the Home Secretary told a BBC reporter in Birmingham that the chief constable of Staffordshire had his figures wrong, demonstrate that there is no clarity in government? Does not backing the police force mean backing chief constables and not calling them liars?

Mr. O'Brien: Staffordshire had the biggest increase of any constabulary between 1995 and 1998. The hon. Gentleman must be sure of his ground when he starts talking about freedom of information, because when he stood for election, the Tory campaign guide—my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has quoted from it before, but it is worth hearing again—said that the party's view on freedom of information legislation was:

"The only group in Britain who are seriously interested in a freedom of information Act are inquisitive left-wing busy bodies."

I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman includes himself in that category.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As an inquisitive left-wing busybody, may I ask how Home Office Ministers fancy the idea of their Bill being contrasted with a Bill, which would be the dream of Mr. Maurice Frankel, put forward by the Edinburgh Parliament? Would that create problems?

Mr. O'Brien: We will ensure that the Bill that comes before this House deals with matters for Britain as a whole. We want to ensure a change in the legislation and a new code of practice to make it effective, as well as a change of culture in government. We have a manifesto commitment to introduce effective freedom of information legislation. We shall have to wait and see what proposals come forward in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament may decide to do things differently; that is the prerogative of devolution. Our freedom of information legislation will substantially change the way in which the Government operate. For 18 years, the previous Government did nothing. We shall deliver freedom of information legislation.

Student Visas

13. **Mr. Richard Allan** (Sheffield, Hallam): What is the current average processing time for an application for the extension of a student visa by the immigration and nationality directorate. [95002]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The time taken to process an application for variation of leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom will vary according to complexity. In many cases, straightforward applications from overseas students are being processed within about six weeks, but applications requiring further inquiries will take longer to process.

Mr. Allan: I hope that the Minister accepts that international students make a huge economic and cultural contribution to my city of Sheffield and to the nation as a whole. I hope that she agrees that it should be an aim of public policy to place as few administrative burdens as possible in their way, consistent with the proper operation of immigration policy. Does she understand that it is distressing for international students to be left without their travel documents, even for only six weeks, although in many cases it runs to months? Will she further consider that more use should be made of local immigration officers, such as we have at Sheffield airport, for processing claims and stamping passports so that students can keep their passports while their claims are being dealt with?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman talks a great deal of sense. I agree that, in the main, overseas students bring great benefit to the UK—principally the reputation of the UK that they take home with them after their time here. About 1,500 applications a week from overseas students are being decided within six weeks of receipt, and applications received since 11 October are being processed within two weeks of receipt. I know of the hon. Gentleman's great interest in the matter, and I will undertake to look at all his constructive suggestions.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I suspect that some of the more problematic applications for extensions are those where students are trying to switch from one course to another. Will the Home Office do all that it can to ensure that, whenever possible, students applying for courses lasting two or three years are given visas for the whole of that period, which would cut the need for repeat applications for extensions?

Mrs. Roche: I understand my hon. Friend's point, and we do look at this matter. This is one of the areas of difficulty that take a little longer to process.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): May I welcome the hon. Lady to the Front Bench in her new Home Office capacity? Does she agree that the problems over the extension of visas for students represent just one detail of what appears to be the increasingly chaotic handling by the Government of the immigration and nationality directorate? British citizens are having to wait up to three months for their post to be opened, and the backlog of immigration and asylum cases amounts to 149,000—it has risen by nearly two and a half times during 1999 alone. Does she agree that this contrasts with the honeyed words of the Home Office's annual report, which talks about the IND and says:

"The situation has now settled, and the majority of problems have been resolved"?

Will the hon. Lady get a grip on her Department's handling of immigration matters? Can she start by telling the House today what date she has given the IND by which it is to comply with the Government's target of processing all asylum applications within six months?

Mrs. Roche: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courteous welcome, which is much appreciated. I must then depart from that to say that I do not agree with a word he had to say. I am amazed that he had the gall to come to this House and say what he said when the Government of whom he was a supporter left the system in such a shambles. He and the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) are adding to the problem following a vote that took place in the other House. The Opposition amendment would drive a coach and horses through the Government's legislation and would cost the taxpayer—including people in the right hon. Lady's own Kent constituency—£500 million. In a letter to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary the day after the vote in the Lords, the right hon. Lady described the amendment as "sensible" and "common sense". What nonsense she talks.

Road Deaths

14. **Mrs. Helen Brinton** (Peterborough): If he will ensure that deaths on the road caused by negligence are treated the same as any other death caused by negligence. [95003]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): A driver who is grossly negligent and causes death may be charged with gross negligence manslaughter, just as he might if death occurred elsewhere than on the road. In other circumstances, deaths on the road can lead to convictions for causing death by dangerous driving or by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs.

Where death results from carelessness, there is no separate offence of "causing death". This is the same as in other situations where negligence falls short of gross negligence.

Mrs. Brinton: Is my hon. Friend aware of the case in Sheffield only last week when a 16-year-old girl's life was valued at a paltry £1,000 in fines and a three-year driving ban for the driver whose actions directly caused her death? Does he agree with me and many other hon. Members that that is yet another tragic example of why the Government must take decisive action as soon as possible?

Mr. Clarke: As my hon. Friend knows, I cannot comment on specific legal cases, but I am aware of cases of the type that she has described; they give great cause for concern in many ways. She brought a delegation from her constituency to see me and discuss these issues in great detail. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the proportion of those convicted going into custody, the average sentence length and the number of people sentenced to five years or more are all increasing year on year. That is a trend in the right direction.

Ellington Colliery

3.30 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

the announcement this morning of the closure of Ellington colliery in my constituency, with the loss of more than 400 jobs.

Ellington is the last deep mine in the north-east. It was closed once before by British Coal, and RJB reopened it, primarily to supply Alcan. A much reduced work force—there used to be nearer 2,000 men—worked hard and efficiently to turn in a profit every year. People in Northumberland have had to accept a substantial amount of opencast mining, partly on the grounds that its product was necessary to enable Ellington's deep-mined coal still to be used by Alcan.

The matter should be considered for debate, first because Ministers must take responsibility for the state of the energy market—with subsidised or below-cost imports and some resumption of the dash for gas, there is too much coal about, which is why RJB can bring in coal from elsewhere to meet its Alcan requirement—and, secondly, because Governments have been involved from the start in the Ellington complex, where coal goes straight from the pit to Alcan's power station to provide the fuel for the smelter. That should not be lightly abandoned in favour of any short-term coal supplies that RJB may happen to have in any of its stockyards across the country.

RJB says that the reserves that can be worked will soon be worked. How soon? We would like to hear Ministers' views. RJB also says that it wants to sell the mine. Will the Government be willing to help a new buyer? The area has double the national unemployment rate and cannot afford to lose more than 400 jobs. If the mine closes, a massive responsibility will fall on Ministers to give further help to the whole of east Northumberland. None of it has objective 1 status and not all of it has even objective 2 status.

We need a debate to find out what Ministers will do if the job losses go ahead. To people in Northumberland, the matter is much more important than whether we print documents on vellum, which is one of the subjects for debate later today. Even if you cannot grant an urgent debate tomorrow, Madam Speaker, I hope that opportunities will arise for me and hon. Members with constituencies neighbouring mine further to reinforce how important the matter is to Northumberland.

Madam Speaker: I have listened very carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. As he knows, I have to give my decision without stating my reasons for it. I am afraid that I do not consider the matter that he has raised to be appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24, so I cannot submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

3.33 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any representation from a Department of Trade and Industry Minister regarding the pit closure? Is there any way in which we can get a Minister to the Dispatch Box through you?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed by a Minister that he wants to make a statement, but the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and others know their way around the House and will know how to pursue the matter.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Before I make my point of order, I refer you to my relevant entry in the Register of Members' Interests.

Since the Bernie Ecclestone affair, in which the Labour party had to return the £1 million that he paid it not to ban tobacco advertising, the Government's policy on the ban has been somewhat confused. Irrespective of the merits of the Government's arguments in favour of a ban, is it in order for Ministers and their supporters to abuse the courts for making decisions that they find politically inconvenient? The Government are entitled to their opinion on tobacco advertising and smoking; I agree that smoking is a danger to health. They are also entitled to appeal the decision made on Friday to stay their ban on advertising. However, are they entitled to resort to abusing the courts? Secondly, have you had a request from the Secretary of State for permission to make a statement explaining why the Government felt it appropriate to make those remarks, as opposed to arguing their case on appeal?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. and learned Gentleman understands, the Speaker has no jurisdiction over comments made outside the House. I have enough responsibilities for comments made in the House, let alone those made outside. In answer to the hon. and learned Gentleman's second question, I have to inform him that I have had no request for any Minister to make a statement.

Orders of the Day

Contracts (Rights of Third Parties) Bill *[Lords]*

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

ARBITRATION PROVISIONS

'.—(1) Where—

(a) a right under section 1 to enforce a term ("the substantive term") is subject to a term providing for the submission of disputes to arbitration ("the arbitration agreement"), and

(b) the arbitration agreement is an agreement in writing for the purposes of Part I of the Arbitration Act 1996,

the third party shall be treated for the purposes of that Act as a party to the arbitration agreement as regards disputes between himself and the promisor relating to the enforcement of the substantive term by the third party.

(2) Where—

(a) a third party has a right under section 1 to enforce a term providing for one or more descriptions of dispute between the third party and the promisor to be submitted to arbitration ("the arbitration agreement"),

(b) the arbitration agreement is an agreement in writing for the purposes of Part I of the Arbitration Act 1996, and

(c) the third party does not fall to be treated under subsection (1) as a party to the arbitration agreement,

the third party shall, if he exercises the right, be treated for the purposes of that Act as a party to the arbitration agreement in relation to the matter with respect to which the right is exercised, and be treated as having been so immediately before the exercise of the right.'.—*[Mr. Lock.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.35 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. David Lock): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 1.

Mr. Lock: The new clause deals with arbitration and will ensure that, where appropriate, the Arbitration Act 1996 applies to the enforcement of third-party rights under the Bill. No one disputes that that is the right policy, but the subject is technical and—I apologise to the House for introducing further amendments on such a subject at this late stage—concerns that were raised during the recess have made us examine the wording carefully.

I record my gratitude to those who raised the concerns and to the arbitration experts who helped us ensure that the drafting was right. Subsection (1) of the new clause will bring in the provisions of the Arbitration Act where the third party's right to enforce a substantive term in his favour is subject to a term providing for the submission of disputes to arbitration.

Subsection (1) will also ensure that when a third party whose right of enforcement is subject to the dispute being referred to arbitration seeks to enforce his right by litigation, the promisor—the other party to the contract—will be able to seek a stay of the proceedings under section 9 of the Arbitration Act. The Bill as now drafted would not allow that course of action if the third party, whose right under the Bill is subject to arbitration, chose to litigate instead. The Government have decided that it would probably not be safe to rely on the court's using its inherent power to stay the proceedings brought by the third party.

Subsection (2) of the new clause is concerned with situations in which the "conditional benefit" approach will not apply—for example, where the contracting parties give the third party a right to arbitrate a dispute other than one concerning a right conferred on the third party under clause 1, such as a tort claim made by the promisor against the third party. We do not believe that such situations will occur often, but to require the third party to arbitrate where there is no other benefit to him would be to impose a pure burden on him, which would be contrary to the policy of the Bill. Subsection (2) therefore brings in the Arbitration Act only where the third party has chosen to exercise the right to arbitrate.

Amendment No. 1 would delete clause 7(4), which is being replaced by the new clause on arbitration.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I am grateful to you for calling me, Madam Speaker, because this is the first opportunity that I have had publicly to welcome both the new Parliamentary Secretaries to the Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) and for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), to their Front-Bench posts. I congratulate them on their appointments.

Promotion to the Lord Chancellor's Department seems to be the precursor of further preferment, so I wonder where both hon. Members will be in a year's time. I am especially delighted because I believe that the hon. Member for Wavertree has set a precedent, in that she is not a lawyer. I do not know whether she is the first non-lawyer ever to be a Minister in that Department, but if so the precedent is welcome, especially to me, because I am the only lawyer among the 26 new Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament. I shall draw the precedent to the attention of our new party leader.

I pay tribute to the Law Commission for its excellent work on the Bill. I am also grateful to the Parliamentary Secretary for his letter to me of 18 October and for advance notice of new clause 1. He will be aware that I raised several points on Second Reading that were dealt with by his predecessor, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), in his letter to me of 12 July.

For reasons of certainty and to incorporate various other provisions—for example, guarantees of performance by third parties given by banks or insurance companies—most commercial organisations will continue to insist on written agreements with third parties, which are usually called collateral warranties or collateral agreements. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will make it clear when he responds that if there is a conflict between a written collateral warranty or agreement and the Bill—including the parties agreeing to contract out of the Bill—the provisions of the written agreement will prevail. I welcome the new clause, because it will go some way to meeting the problems that I envisaged on Second Reading and that were dealt with by the letter I received from the hon. Member for Leicester, East.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I join the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett)

in his congratulations to the hon. Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) and for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy) on their appointments. It is an especial pleasure to welcome them because I worked with the hon. Lady on cross-party matters in the previous Parliament and because the hon. Gentleman and I come from the same chambers in Birmingham. I am sure that he will join me in welcoming the fact that, in addition to his appointment and mine, the head of our former chambers—now called St. Philip's chambers—is the new leader of the Midland and Oxford circuit. Our chambers therefore has triple cause for celebration.

Like the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon, the official Opposition accept that new clause 1 is a useful clarification. The Parliamentary Secretary was kind enough to write to me as well to explain the new clause and, as somebody who was at one stage an associate member of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators and dealt with cases involving collateral warranties, I recognise that the Government are right to doubt whether it would be safe to rely on an inherent power in the court to stay proceedings brought by the third party in the circumstances mentioned by the Parliamentary Secretary.

New clause 1(2) is a wise change, because it will bring in the Arbitration Act 1996 only in cases in which the third party has chosen to exercise the right to arbitrate. It is helpful that the Parliamentary Secretary has given the Opposition parties advance notice of the Government's intentions, and we welcome the clarification contained in the new clause.

Mr. Lock: I can confirm to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) that it is the Government's understanding that new clause 1—and, indeed, the whole Bill—will not affect the operation of collateral warranties. It will be up to the parties themselves whether they choose to enter into collateral warranties or rely on the terms of the Bill. Indeed, under the terms of the Bill, the original parties to the contract will be able to specify the extent to which, if at all, the contract will apply to third parties and can, if they choose, contract out of the third party rights in their entirety. In those circumstances, it is correct to say that the provisions of any collateral warranty will take precedence over any rights under the Bill.

I am grateful for the kind words from the hon. Members for Torridge and West Devon and for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), and I concur with what the latter said about the position of our previous chambers. I also welcome the appointment of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy) to prove that the Lord Chancellor's Department is neither an all-boys club nor entirely a lawyers club.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

NORTHERN IRELAND

'.—(1) In its application to Northern Ireland, this Act has effect with the modifications specified in subsections (2) and (3).

(2) In section 6(2), for "section 14 of the Companies Act 1985" there is substituted "Article 25 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986".

(3) In section 7, for subsection (3) there is substituted—

"(3) In Articles 4(a) and 15 of the Limitation (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, the references to an action founded on a simple contract and an action upon an instrument under seal shall respectively include references to an action brought in reliance on section 1 relating to a simple contract and an action brought in reliance on that section relating to a contract under seal.".

(4) In the Law Reform (Husband and Wife) (Northern Ireland) Act 1964, the following provisions are hereby repealed—

(a) section 5, and

(b) in section 6, in subsection (1)(a), the words "in the case of section 4" and "and in the case of section 5 the contracting party" and, in subsection (3), the words "or section 5".'.—*[Mr. Lock.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.45 pm

Mr. Lock: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 3.

Mr. Lock: In 1998, the Law Reform Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland issued a report which recommended for Northern Ireland reforms similar to those contained in the Bill. As contract law in Northern Ireland has traditionally paralleled that in England and Wales, it was originally the Government's intention to implement the Law Reform Advisory Committee's recommendations by extending the Bill directly to Northern Ireland. However, as the prospect of devolution grew ever closer, it was decided that, as contract law will fall within the transferred area of competence, the reforms should be a matter for decision by the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. Regrettably, however, the Assembly is not yet up and running, and the Government have decided that this valuable piece of law reform should therefore be extended directly to Northern Ireland.

Amendment No. 3 directly extends the provisions of the Bill to Northern Ireland, subject to the consequential amendments that are contained in the new clause.

Subsections (1), (2) and (3) of the new clause make minor consequential amendments to clauses 6 and 7 of the Bill, so that the references to legislation will apply to the equivalent statutory provisions in Northern Ireland.

Subsection (4) of the new clause repeals section 5 of the Law Reform (Husband and Wife) (Northern Ireland) Act 1964, which has no direct equivalent in England and Wales. That section modifies the rule of privity of contract in respect of contracts that expressly confer a right on the spouse or child of the contracting parties. As the Bill before us makes comprehensive provision for third-party beneficiaries under a contract, there will no longer be any need for that provision on the Northern Ireland statute book when the Bill receives Royal Assent.

Subsection (4) also makes a minor consequential amendment to section 6 of the Law Reform (Husband and Wife) (Northern Ireland) Act 1964, which takes account of the repeal of section 5 of that Act.

Mr. Burnett: I shall not delay the House long. In the absence of any Member of Parliament from the Province, I simply ask whether full consultation has taken place with the legal and other professional bodies in the

[Mr. Burnett]

Province, and have they raised any objections, or any points requiring clarification, concerning the Bill's impact on the Province?

Mr. Hawkins: I, too, can be brief. I was simply worried about what the Minister said in his covering letter to me, when he raised the question of uncertainty over the Northern Ireland Assembly. The future of Northern Ireland is in all our thoughts, for reasons much more serious than the contents of the Bill. I wonder whether the Minister might say a word or two about what he meant by the uncertainty over the Northern Ireland Assembly. I also associate myself with the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon.

Mr. Lock: In answer to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon, yes, there has been consultation, and yes, as I said, these provisions arose from a report of the Law Reform Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland published last year and, as far as I am aware, no substantive objections have been made to the extension of the rights in the Bill—which is a Law Commission Bill—to Northern Ireland.

In answer to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, I do not feel that it would help the delicate position in Northern Ireland to say anything further at the Dispatch Box this afternoon about the relationship between Britain and Northern Ireland, save that I do not feel that it is right that, given that these rights will be of value to people in Northern Ireland, we should hold up their implementation while other political events continue elsewhere.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 6

EXCEPTIONS

Mr. Lock: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 5, line 4, after '2', insert 'or 3'.

Amendment No. 2 adds part B of schedule 3 to the Carriage by Air Acts (Application of Provisions) Order 1967 to the list of international transport conventions in subsection (8) of clause 6. Contracts that are subject to the rules of the conventions in this list are excluded from the effects of the Bill because we do not believe that we should interfere where other legislation deals expressly with the question of third-party rights. This schedule, which was inserted after the Law Commission had published its report and which was therefore not in the original Bill, is concerned with the regulation of the international carriage of cargo by air.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 7

SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS RELATING TO THIRD PARTY

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 5, line 18, leave out subsection (4).—*[Mr. Lock.]*

Clause 8

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendment made: No. 3, in page 5, line 41, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'(4) This Act extends as follows—

(a) section *(Northern Ireland)* extends to Northern Ireland only;

(b) the remaining provisions extend to England and Wales and Northern Ireland only.'.—*[Mr. Lock.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

3.51 pm

Mr. Lock: This welcome Bill is the result of another excellent piece of work by the Law Commission and has met with support from all sides, both in another place and in this House. I should like to express my gratitude to the Law Commission for all its work on this Bill, and to all the organisations and individuals who have contributed to the development of our policy, including all those who have taken part in the debates during the Bill's passage through this House and in another place. I am particularly grateful to Professor Andrew Burrows for his continued help after the Law Commission's Report was published in 1996.

Although this is a short Bill, it is immensely technical in character. Virtually every word reflects a careful policy decision by the Law Commission, for which the Government are grateful. This important Bill reforms the common law rule of privity of contract, under which a person can take action to enforce a contract only if he is a party to it.

It might be helpful if I gave a brief example of the benefits of the Bill. Let us assume that a couple are getting married. A relative goes to a shop where a wedding list is kept, buys them a three-piece suite as a wedding present and arranges to have it delivered directly to them. It is made clear in the discussions with the furniture shop that holds the list that the suite is a gift for the couple. Under the rule of privity of contract, the couple would not have any recourse against the shop because they were not parties to the contract. Any action against the shop for breach of contract would have to be taken by the relative who was one of the original contracting parties.

The Bill provides that a third party will have the right to enforce a term of a contract, both where the contract expressly provides that he should and where the contract purports to confer a benefit on him, provided that it does not appear that it was not the parties' intention that the term should be enforceable by the third party. In my example, the Bill would allow the couple who received the suite as a wedding present, and who are third-party beneficiaries of the contract between the relative and the shop, to take action directly against the shop for any breach of contract.

In view of the questions that were asked on Second Reading and in Committee, I should stress that whether the Bill applies to a particular contract will depend on the express or implied intentions of the original contracting parties. I must also stress the need for clear and careful drafting of contracts so that the intentions of the

contracting parties are obvious. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) who made a similar point on Second Reading.

We have also been asked whether the Bill should state that it binds the Crown, so that where the Crown is the promisor it may be sued by a third party. The Bill does not impose any obligation or restraint on the Crown. It is simply an enabling measure for the benefit of parties to contracts, to make it possible for them to give third parties enforceable rights by agreement. The language of "binding the Crown" is inappropriate here. It is the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 that enables proceedings in contract to be brought against the Crown, whether they are brought by the promisee or by a third party.

The construction industry has shown a keen interest in the Bill, both through the hon. Member for Surrey Heath in this House, and in the other place. I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to meet representatives of the Construction Confederation to hear their concerns. Having heard those concerns, I hope that it may be helpful if I explain the policy behind two of the Bill's clauses.

First, the intention of clause 1(5) is that all the remedies available to a person bringing a claim for breach of contract should be available to a third party seeking to enforce his rights under the Bill, and that the normal rules relating to damages, injunctions, specific performance and other relief should apply accordingly. It has been suggested that we should amend the Bill so that it specifies that the rules on foreseeability in damages claims should apply. If the Bill listed only one of the rules on damages, it could cast doubt on the application of the other rules on damages, such as the duty to mitigate loss.

Nor is a comprehensive listing necessary because the clause refers to

"the rules relating to damages".

That means all the rules that the courts have deemed necessary to regulate the assessment of damages. It would be inconsistent with our aim to try to set out all the common law rules that could apply and to freeze the statute in time in the face of a developing common law. Our intention is that the Bill should avoid that by setting out the principles of fundamental change which it makes to the law without descending to the level of unnecessary detail.

The other issue on which I have promised to provide further explanation is concerned with the use of the term "variation" in clause 2. The clause will affect provisions in construction contracts which allow the items of work under a contract to be varied as the construction proceeds, so as to accommodate changing circumstances. The construction industry's concern, which I accept is legitimate, arises because the Bill uses the word "variation" in its strict and correct legal meaning—a variation of the terms of an agreement by further agreement between the parties to the original agreement. But when the construction industry uses the term it often refers to alterations to the work done within the terms of the original agreement and without varying its terms.

The usual situation is a contract which allows one of the parties to change the specifications of work unilaterally, subject to a change in the amount to be paid. The Law Commission was aware of the way in which the construction industry used the term when it produced its report, and made it clear that such changes to work specifications would not be covered by the restrictions in clause 2, even if they were described in the industry as variations to the work. The point is dealt with at paragraph 9.37 of the Law Commission's report, with which I agree.

As clause 2 does not apply to variations of work rather than of the terms of contract, the third party's rights will be subject to any provisions in the contract which allow what has been built to be varied unilaterally. If the hon. Member for Surrey Heath has been persuaded that the Law Commission was not correct, I may respond, with the leave of the House, to any concern that he may raise.

I am grateful to the hon. Members for Surrey Heath and for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) for their constructive and helpful approach to this valuable law reform measure. I commend the Bill to the House.

3.58 pm

Mr. Hawkins: I greatly welcome the Minister's helpful clarification. I am grateful to him for meeting a delegation of leaders of the construction industry which I took to see him a few weeks ago. He made it clear then that he was prepared to clarify these points so that we could rely on what has been said in future cases, in line with the Pepper *v.* Hart decision, and I am grateful to him.

The industry has continuing concerns but is prepared to accept the Minister's helpful clarification. The Opposition echo what the Minister said about the value of the Law Commission's work, and we made it clear in Committee and on Second Reading that we greatly welcome the Bill, which is a helpful, and perhaps overdue, change in the law. As the Minister has clarified matters specifically to help the construction industry, I can do no other than welcome what he has said.

3.59 pm

Mr. Burnett: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying the provisions on variations. I am grateful also to the Law Commission for its excellent work and for promoting this Bill, which we support and will not impede.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INSURANCE BROKERS REGISTRATION COUNCIL

That the draft Insurance Brokers (Registration) Act 1977 (Amendment) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 19th October, be approved.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

That the draft Financial Services Act 1986 (Restriction of Exemption) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 27th July, be approved.

VALUE ADDED TAX

That the Value Added Tax (Sport, Sports Competitions and Physical Education) Order 1999 (S.I., 1999, No. 1994), dated 14th July 1999, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th July, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community Documents.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

HARMONISATION OF COPYRIGHT AND ELECTRONIC COMMERCE IN THE SINGLE MARKET

That this House takes note of European Union Document Nos. 5562/98, a draft Directive on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the Information Society, and 8723/99, an amended draft of this Directive; and of European Union Documents Nos. 5123/99, a draft Directive on certain legal aspects of electronic commerce in the internal market, and 10644/99, an amended draft of this Directive, and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 18th October 1999; and concerning the draft Directive on the harmonisation of copyright, supports the Government's view that while harmonisation of copyright laws for the digital age is essential, the outcome should be a regime that safeguards a fair balance of rights and interests between the various categories of rights holders and between rights holders, users and intermediaries, and has due regard to subsidiarity; and concerning the draft Directive on electronic commerce in the internal market, welcomes the Government's continued efforts to put in place a light but effective framework for the development of electronic commerce within the internal market; and supports the Government's view that such a framework is necessary to ensure consumer and business confidence in electronic commerce.

TAXATION OF ENERGY PRODUCTS

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 6793/97, a draft Directive restructuring the Community framework for the taxation of energy products; and supports the Government's objective of securing a permanent exemption for the domestic use of energy.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Record Copies of Acts

[Relevant document: The Second Report from the Administration Committee on Record Copies of Acts (HC 539).]

Madam Speaker: We come now to motion 7 on record copies of Acts. It is for the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) to move the Lords message.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I beg to move that this House agrees with the Lords in their resolution.

Madam Speaker: May I give the hon. Gentleman a little guidance? I require him to move the first motion, which is that the Lords message be now considered. Once that is formally moved, we can make a start.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful for that guidance. I beg to move

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Objection.

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman objects, he must divide the House.

Mr. White: I am sorry, Madam Speaker. I misunderstood when the Division was due.

Ordered,

That the Lords Message of 19th October, communicating a resolution relating to record copies of Acts of Parliament, be now considered.—*[Dr. Palmer.]*

4.1 pm

Dr. Palmer: I beg to move,

That this House agrees with the Lords in their resolution.

I convey to the House apologies from the Chairman of the Administration Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe). I know that she has already written to you, Madam Speaker, but she had a long-standing prior engagement that she could not break.

The Lords message contains the recommendations made by the Administration Committee in its second report. In effect, if not in fact, the House is being asked to approve our report. As it was unanimous, I can speak on behalf of the hon. Member for Broxbourne and all my Committee colleagues. I thank the Clerk of the House for detailed way in which he put his case and the Administration and Works Sub-Committee in another place and the Clerk of the Parliaments. As the matter was of equal interest to both Houses, the Committee was pleased that the other place kept us informed fully of progress on the parallel proposals there.

Although I support the modernisation of Parliament's procedures and practices, I am not an iconoclast. I do not advocate or support change for its own sake. I had to be convinced that the proposal to keep record copies on paper rather than vellum was justifiable and that it would be appropriate both in terms of practicality and of what I might call the dignity of the House.

There are two strands to our report. The first would end the deposition of duplicate record copies of both public and private Acts at the Public Record Office. That appears

to serve no useful purpose and the Committee received no representations against the proposals from hon. Members, the PRO, the Master of the Rolls or anyone else. My short speech will therefore concentrate on our other proposal that, from next year, record copies of Acts should be preserved on archival paper rather than on vellum goatskin.

The proposal has generated some interest among hon. Members and others, including the impressively powerful campaign of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White), who has fought hard on behalf of his constituents who work for William Cowley's, the company that produces vellum. The proprietor of Cowley's and his relatives have vigorously mobilised opposition; they have inspired letters from, among others, the British Library, the National Library of Wales, the National Library of Scotland and Trinity college, Dublin. All those bodies claim that vellum is best for maintaining record copies; they have expressed various concerns and have made arguments about why that should be so. I shall address those concerns, and hope to convince the House that they are groundless. I shall add a—perhaps—more fundamental reason why those libraries have made those objections.

It has been pointed out that vellum is less susceptible than paper to fire damage. However, the problem with that argument is that vellum and paper are both flammable, so security cannot depend only on the document's material. If there is a serious fire, a document will burn whether it is of vellum or paper. I remind the House that all the records of the House of Commons were destroyed in the fire of 1834, whereas most of the records of the House of Lords survived. That was not because the House of Lords documents were recorded on a different material, but because officials, policemen and soldiers braved the flames and were able to save many of the documents by throwing them out of the window. We depend partly on that type of physical security; the Administration Committee and other Committees are anxious to maximise it. However, to rely only on the fact that the paper itself will not burn is not adequate.

Let us suppose that the record copy of an Act was destroyed or damaged. That would not be such a disaster as it would at first appear. One possible course of action would be the issue of a new, authenticated version by the Clerk of the Parliaments of the day. The Stationery Office has helpfully offered to provide a CD-Rom of the authenticated text for the Public Record Office. That would be much easier for hon. Members and for the Library to consult than a paper or vellum record, so the paper copy would be requested less often, and would be less likely to be damaged in the first place.

It has been claimed that electronic documents cease to be readable after a few years, unless constantly upgraded. That is a misunderstanding based on the fact that people who work with different versions of Word, for example, are aware that they may not stay current after several years. However, as I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East will agree, the computing industry met that concern with the introduction of portable document format and other formats that are designed to last and can be supported by future documents.

Mr. White: I am slightly confused. Is my hon. Friend saying that internet technology and CD-Rom are incompatible with the storage of records on vellum? I would have thought that both could occur at the same time. Why is that technology an objection to the continued use of vellum?

Dr. Palmer: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend that the fact that we now have additional ways of providing secure copies is not an argument against vellum; it is merely that the fact that it is possible to set fire to a piece of paper is not a conclusive argument against paper.

It was claimed that the Committee was biased against the use of animal products—because vellum is goatskin and paper is not. The idea that we should not use animal products unnecessarily is an attractive one. However, we did not advance that argument either in our report, or in the memorandum appended to it by the Clerk of the House. Neither sentiment nor animal welfare considerations affected our judgment. We reached our conclusion for practical—even prosaic—reasons.

The crucial matter is the durability of paper as a suitable medium for record copies of Acts. That is confirmed in the memorandum from the Clerk of the House, which forms the appendix to our report. The memorandum states:

> "British Library Conservation Department laboratory tests have proven a life expectancy of 250 years and indicate that archival paper can have a life expectancy exceeding 500 years."

If the Clerk's memorandum has a fault, it is there—it is far too conservative, although I hate to label the Clerk as one of the dark forces of conservatism. The House should consider how paper can last and, indeed, has lasted—I am talking about true paper, as invented by the Chinese in the first century AD, rather than about papyrus, which was invented even earlier.

The British Library contains paper documents from the Han dynasty; although they bear no specific date, they can be dated by association to between 25 AD and 220 AD, but let us be conservative and assume that they date from the end of that period. The documents are almost 1,800 years old—they are twice as old as Westminster Hall, three times as old as the earliest Act of Parliament in the House of Lords Record Office and they predate Magna Carta by 1,000 years. I yield to no one in my respect for the Acts that Parliament passes, but I suggest that that is a reasonable period of time for the original paper copy to last, given that we also have electronic support these days. Those of an historical bent might be interested to learn that the earliest complete and printed book in the world, the Diamond Sutra, is more than 1,100 years old. Record copies of Acts will be kept in proper archival conditions and, as with all House documents, they will be printed on paper with an alkali reserve to ensure that a non-acid pH balance will be maintained over the years.

Another factor that influenced the Committee's decision and which has not been called into dispute is that archival paper is considerably less bulky than vellum. That is an important consideration, given that storage space is finite, especially in the Lords Record Office, which, like many other archives, is getting short of space. When hon. Members raised the matter with her, the hon. Member for Broxbourne, who is the Chairman of the Committee, organised an illustration of the difference in thickness by comparing copies of the Finance Act 1998. The House will be aware that such Acts are rarely short: the vellum copy of the 1998 Act was three times as thick

[Dr. Palmer]

as the paper version. The question of thickness will become even more important when Bills and Acts are printed in a larger typeface, as has been proposed. That welcome move will assist visually impaired Members of Parliament and others, but larger print will mean more pages—in the case of vellum, three times more.

On the question of cost, the Committee's report mentions savings of about £30,000 a year. Some hon. Members have described that as a derisory sum, but the Committee believes in principle that no sum accruing to the taxpayer is derisory and that if we can save money, we should.

Mr. White: Were the costs considered purely the costs to the House authorities?

Dr. Palmer: The cost is the raw cost of purchasing paper compared with the cost of purchasing vellum. However, £30,000 is not all that would be saved, as that is only the savings on the cost of raw material.

Because printing on vellum is highly specialised and because only one company in Britain does it, it is costly and we do not have the opportunity to take tenders for the contract to print Acts from printers other than the Stationary Office. If we print Acts on archival paper, genuinely competitive conditions for the award of new printing contracts could result in savings. The Committee anticipates that the savings thus secured would considerably exceed £30,000. I cannot quantify those savings, but I can state that, since 1993, the House authorities have been able to make savings of about £3 million in expenditure on publishing House documents. About one third of that saving has been made since the privatisation of HMSO. Although that move is not supported universally on other grounds, it must be acknowledged that House officials have been able to use the same competitive conditions that will apply if we introduce archival paper.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am listening with rapt attention as the hon. Gentleman develops his argument. The anxieties expressed by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) are well understood and respected on both sides of the House. Will the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) advise the House at what point in the process the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East apprised the Administration Committee of his concerns on behalf of his constituents?

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention: it is always a pleasure to have his rapt attention. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East approached the Committee as soon as he heard about the proposal and realised that it would affect a firm in his constituency. However, my hon. Friend is in a better position to answer that question.

Mr. White: I first heard about the proposal when I read the Committee's report.

Dr. Palmer: I am sure that my hon. Friend raised his concerns at the earliest opportunity. We acknowledge that he has been fighting extremely hard on behalf of the company in his constituency.

Against the background that I have mentioned, it may seem puzzling that distinguished libraries have recommended retaining vellum. Why are they so interested? Another factor has undoubtedly influenced their views; it is a five letter word: m-o-n-e-y. With the indulgence of the House, I shall quote from a letter that the Committee received from Trinity college, Dublin, which reads:

"The availability of this material"—

that is, vellum—

"at a price and quality our libraries and archives feel they can afford depends on the efficiency and productivity of the vellum makers . . . The half dozen skins that we"—

that is, the libraries—

"purchase each year . . . will do little to sustain the craft or business . . . This indirect support"—

from the House—

"will do much to aid our preservation work".

I understand that argument: if I were a chief librarian, I would wish to secure an effective subsidy from the House to help meet the costs of my library. The question is: should we force the taxpayer to subsidise our national libraries so that they do not have to pay the going rate for vellum?

I have a great deal of sympathy with the view that public money should be used to preserve our national treasures and to support libraries. However, let us support the libraries directly: let us not wrap up that support in a subsidy for vellum.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): In view of the hon. Gentleman's comments about libraries, can he assure the House that the conservation programme of the Public Record Office will not be adversely affected by the economic factors that he has described?

Dr. Palmer: I understand that the Public Record Office accepts that this proposal will result in a significant saving to the public purse. I have not spoken to its officers directly—I am slightly handicapped in that I am acting as deputy to the hon. Member for Broxbourne—but I understand that the cost to the Public Record Office will be more than compensated for by savings to the public purse.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I apologise for not being in the Chamber to hear the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks, but I am extremely interested in his concern for the public purse—it is interesting to hear a Labour Member express such a view. As the hon. Gentleman sets great store by a saving of £30,000 to the Exchequer, will he remind the House how much rooms across the road for Members of Parliament cost?

Madam Speaker: Order. That is a very interesting point and the information is available, but it is not at all relevant to this motion.

Dr. Palmer: As much as I would like to answer the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), I am, alas, unable to do so.

Hon. Members may say that we are getting rid of a tradition, but it is a tradition that can no longer be justified. The printing of Acts on goatskin should go the

same way as tally sticks and collapsible top hats. It is slightly ironic that the House of Lords, which one sometimes hears criticised for not being in touch with the modern world, readily accepted the proposals without a Division. Our constituents will react with total incredulity if the House rejects this motion and insists that our laws be inscribed on goatskin. That policy might be prestigious for a tribe of nomadic goatherds, but it is, frankly, bizarre for the Britain of today. To put it bluntly, such a decision would serve only to make this House look out of touch.

The Committee has carefully considered all the representations made and produced a concise, convincing report, which I commend to the House.

4.21 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I shall not delay the House for long in giving the Opposition's view that the resolution should be approved. The printing of Acts on vellum is an anachronistic practice that dates back to 1849. In October 1956, Madam Speaker, one of your predecessors was wise enough to institute a partial change by suggesting that private Acts should no longer be printed on vellum and deposited in the Public Record Office.

I shall be so bold as to suggest that the Opposition regard the move as part of the common-sense revolution. It is ironic that in these days of computers and electronic data storage, we should be debating the merits or otherwise of continuing to keep the work of the House stored on vellum. The case for change has been made admirably by the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) on behalf of the Committee. Vellum is very expensive, and the note by the Clerk of the House that is appended to the report suggests that printing last year's Finance Act alone on vellum cost nearly £12,000. That cost is increased by the necessity to place duplicate copies on vellum in the Public Record Office.

I do not know, and the hon. Member for Broxtowe did not mention, why, in 1985, his predecessor Committee rejected the proposal to extend the proposals to public Acts.

Dr. Palmer: I understand that the then Committee included an hon. Member in whose constituency there was a vellum manufacturer. He argued very forcefully against the proposals, and the matter was not proceeded with.

Mr. Walter: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those comments because they probably make the case exceedingly well.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. Far be it from me to interrupt the eloquence of his flow for long, but the remarks just made by the hon. Member for Broxtowe are a source of anxiety to me because I have attended closely to the letter that I received from the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. White). In paragraph 7 he informs me that he understands that the vellum producers nearest to those in his constituency are in France. I sense a split between Labour Members, and I would be grateful if that could be resolved as speedily as possible.

Mr. Walter: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Unfortunately, I can throw no light on the question of where the nearest alternative source of vellum is to be found other than the correspondence that I, too, have had with the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White).

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping): Perhaps I may assist the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter). As I understand it, representations were made in 1985 on behalf of a firm that manufactured vellum. That firm no longer exists. The firm in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. White) produces vellum. The impression that the House has been given that the nearest alternative supply of vellum is in France is correct.

Mr. Walter: I thank the Minister for that clarification.

I said that I would not delay the House in giving the Opposition's view. We have no objection to the motion, and shall let the matter stand there.

4.25 pm

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I apologise for the earlier confusion when I objected to the first motion.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), I was in the computer industry before I entered this House, so I have no problem with the modern techniques of recording Acts. I have supported wholeheartedly the efforts of the Modernisation Committee to modernise the processes of the House.

I oppose the motion for three reasons: first, because of the way in which the matter was handled, to which I shall return; secondly, because I disagree with the Committee's arguments, which I hope to demonstrate are wrong; and thirdly, and most importantly, because the decision means the end of an industry in which Britain leads the world. I hope that, for each of those reasons, the House will support me in what I understand is a free vote, and reject the Committee's report, so that we can find a different way forward.

Committee members did not talk to the supplier until it was too late and they had made their decision. Let us take the issue of the Finance Bill, to which the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) referred. The House authorities asked for a certain quantity of vellum; it was supplied. Then, at very short notice, they asked for a considerable quantity more, demanding it within 24 or 48 hours. Any reasonable request could have been met.

Mr. Bercow: I reiterate that I understand and am sensitive to the hon. Gentleman's legitimate anxieties. Will he clarify for the benefit of the House whether the company in his constituency was given any opportunity to make representations? If it was not, that would, at the very least, count as a rank discourtesy, and the hon. Gentleman would have every reason to be dissatisfied about it.

Mr. White: The hon. Gentleman makes the point about the supplier's feelings more eloquently than I can. The supplier has written several letters and received replies, but in a letter to me in September, he said:

"I have tried to find out more about the reason behind the review of Vellum.

I cannot find any reason why the officials of the Public Bills Office were so 'determined' to hold the Press to its contract when there was no . . . reason."

It seems to him that there has been a campaign to end his contract; that it was a question of making a decision and then finding reasons for it. He is rightly upset about that. One of the things that worry me is the way in which the episode has been handled, because I do not think that it has been handled correctly. Many issues, such as those of cost, thickness and storage, could have been resolved in discussion with the supplier. There did not need to be a change of material.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that this important debate was not important. The jobs in his constituency are very important; I accept the arguments on behalf of his miners. The supplier is very important to an old part of my constituency, so I contend that this an important debate.

Dr. Palmer: Is my hon. Friend asserting that, with further consultation, it would have been possible to reduce the bulk of vellum by one third and to eliminate all the extra cost?

Mr. White: I am saying that it would have been possible to reduce the thickness and costs. Whether that was what the Committee had in mind would have been resolved by discussion.

One of the arguments compared vellum with archival paper. I quote from a letter that I have received from the British Library:

"my colleagues at the British Library were consulted about recommending an archival quality paper, which they were happy to do. I understand that they were not asked to compare the longevity of parchment with that of paper."

Therefore, the question that they were asked was not necessarily the one that should have been asked.

Equally, the Institute of Paper Conservation has said:

"We are concerned by the Select Committee's statement that archival paper has a proven life expectancy of 250 years, possibly more."

I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe was right to say 500 years. The institute goes on:

"It seems to ignore the more fundamental problem of finding and securing supplies of archival paper made to the high specification required."

Again, the House has been given only part of the story. It is possible to get the sort of quality from the paper to which my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe referred, but it comes at a cost. It is not a matter of going to the local branch of Staple's and picking up some paper. There are issues to be resolved on the question of high quality.

We have already heard that the recommendation is about achieving a saving to the House, but fundamental costs to libraries and to archives would increase, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe accepted.

When we compare longevity of 250 or 500 years with the 1,500 years of vellum, the cost of £30,000 pales into insignificance. The supplier has assured me that the thickness requirement is dictated by the House authorities. He could easily supply vellum at half the current thickness if he were asked to do so. New techniques are being developed all the time that improve the quality of vellum at a much thinner specification. Again, no one has discussed that with him. It was taken as read that the current thickness was required. No one asked whether the vellum could be thinner.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe recognised that it is not an animal welfare issue. The calf skin is from animals that are already dead, or that would be used for other purposes—it is waste material.

It has been alleged that there is a short supply of vellum. Again, the evidence that I have would dispute that. One of the most fundamental suggestions in the report is that it is difficult to print on vellum, but that seems to ignore modern developments that mean that printing on vellum is possible from a standard ink-jet printer. If that can be done, there will be no problem in continuing to use vellum. Other people are not suggesting that there are printing problems with vellum.

I have a letter from Sotheby's, which suggests an idea for the House:

"Would you like to borrow a piece of real medieval vellum? . . . If you were speaking about the durability of vellum and could exhibit a piece, you could virtually defy anyone in the House to tear it in half."

My notes are on vellum. Before I came into the Chamber, I offered them to the Government Whips and said, "If you want to rip them up, feel free to do so." As hon. Members can see, they were unable to tear them in half.

There is a fundamental reason for opposing the motion. Arguments in the Committee's report could be discussed. In fact, arguments on both sides could be discussed with the supplier. There is only one supplier in the country who deals with vellum; Britain leads the world in the sector. If we were to lose that supplier, an industry would be lost. The company has one major contract, on which all the others depend. It is sustained by its contract with the House—so that, in turn, it is able to supply vellum to its other clients, such as bookbinders, archives and museums. The contract also enables the firm to supply very small quantities of vellum to other clients, such as—as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe said—the six pieces supplied to Trinity college.

We can save our vellum industry, and the unique skills practised in it. The National Library of Scotland stated:

"This material is more durable and long lasting than even the archival papers in common use today. Archival papers are long lasting but they do not have the life of parchment/vellum and are yet unproven . . . If it is the intention to preserve the original records of state for as long as possible, then parchment/vellum should be the information carrier."

Christopher Clarkson, a conservator of library and archive materials, said:

"I teach in many countries, including America, and I can in all honesty say that many workshops rely on England . . .

Your colleagues in Parliament may think that discontinuation of the use of parchment is an economy, but they must be made aware of the larger picture."

In the aftermath of the Florence flood disaster, the skills of many people were required. Subsequently, many of those skills have been lost. If the House cancels the contract, Britain will lose conservation, bookbinding and archival skills, and, in the years to come, we will come to rue the decision.

The National Library of Wales said:

"Vellum is essential for the conservation of historic books and manuscripts, but it is used in far smaller quantities for conservation than when it is used for printing, and in my opinion the combined purchasing power of British conservators is insufficient to sustain the sole surviving British manufacturer of vellum."

The House may decide that making a £30,000 economy justifies destroying an industry—but such a decision would be wrong. We are again in danger of being penny wise, but pound foolish. If the company loses the contract and goes out of business, we shall be putting a dozen people out of work. Although that number of jobs lost—compared with those lost in the coal, steel or shipbuilding industries—is not great, we shall be losing entirely another industry and the skills that create products that we export around the world.

I ask the House to reject the report, so that we might find another solution. If we reject the report, we shall be able to continue discussions with the supplier on finding savings. If the report is accepted, we shall damage not only the company and my constituency, but—most of all—the United Kingdom.

I refer Opposition Members to today's editorial in *The Times*, which urges them to treat the matter with the importance that it deserves. I tell Conservative Members that, if last week's rhetoric meant anything, they should vote today to support a British industry that depends on British agriculture. Any Conservative Member who votes today to accept the report will only be exposing as rhetoric the statements that the official Opposition made last week.

I remind my colleagues that, when we were in opposition, we were unable to save the shipbuilding industry or the coal mines—which others had resolved to destroy. If we accept the report, we too shall be destroying an industry, albeit a small one.

We should deal with the matter properly. There should be proper consultation, so that we might find the best way forward and treat people decently. The proposal would make a small saving for a small number of people, but we would lose something important for everybody else.

I ask the House to reject the report and give us time to find a different way forward that does not destroy an industry. The nearest vellum producers are in France. Whether the other business would go there remains to be seen, but we would lose it for this country. I shall be pushing for a Division. We need to have further discussions to look at the wider picture and engage in joined-up thinking rather than just saving money for the House authorities at the cost of jobs and industries and increasing costs for libraries and other parts of the public sector. Please reject the report.

4.40 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I have listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) with considerable interest. I understand, and have some sympathy with, his legitimate constituency concerns. However, we support the Committee's recommendations and the resolution. They are in the interests of the economy and of the better running of the affairs of this House.

4.41 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) may be pleased to know that he will not be the only one voting against the motion, because I—and, I believe, one or two of my colleagues—will support him. It is one of the tragedies of our time that the Government clothe every change that they make with the word "modernise". That is held to be enough to uproot our traditions and change the way in which we do many things.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way so early in his speech. Is he aware that the proposal comes not from the Government, but from an all-party Committee chaired by his hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe)?

Mr. Howarth: Yes, I can read. I understand that this is a House matter and that the Whips will not be in evidence tonight. I am glad that this is a matter for the House to debate. I preface my remarks by saying that it is one of the tragedies of our time that the Government clothe everything with the word "modernise" and believe that that is sufficient justification for their actions. Some Committees of the House do the same. This is a case in point. We are told that we must modernise. Even my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) said that we have an antiquated arrangement.

I am a traditionalist. I believe in tradition, as do the people of this country. That is the first reason why I object to the conclusions of the report. The note by the Clerk of the House in the report says that the matter was considered in 1985. A similar proposal was agreed by the other place and was considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee. The note continues:

"it is believed that Members took the view that the anticipated level of savings did not justify a departure from long-standing tradition."

I take the view that, if it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change. That is the foundation of tradition. I share the view of the 1985 Committee.

As the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East has said, it is not just the House that benefits from the 12 jobs in his constituency. University College Dublin has made representations to us because it derives some benefit. I thought that the Conservatives were in favour of cross-subsidisation. If the House can play a small part in helping to maintain a skill and tradition in this country that is not available elsewhere, save perhaps in France, we should take that into account. We should not lightly dispense with a skill available to this country that is of great value and practical assistance not only to University College Dublin, but to other institutions. We have long been admired for the way in which we conserve pictures and books. We need to maintain that, and should reject it only for good reasons.

The Committee and the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) have referred to costs as one of the real reasons to depart from the recommendations of the Committee in 1985. It seems to be a rather small amount, worth about eight months' pay for one Member of Parliament. To use the terms of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East, it is eight months of one Member for 12 of his constituents. I would not like to ask the House to anticipate which the public would see as the better deal. They would probably be prepared to dispense with any number of hon. Members for 12 of the hon. Gentleman's skilled constituents.

It is true that £30,000 is a lot of money but, set against the cost of the new building at Westminster—some £1 million per Member, I am told—£30,000 is not a lot to maintain a tradition, preserve skills and make available a service to museums and other conservators. That is a

[Mr. Howarth]

small contribution that this House could make. People might think it odd that we are prepared to spend all that money on ourselves, while taking action that would put 12 of the hon. Gentleman's constituents out of work.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the Cabinet were to take a further measure of pay restraint, the savings could be found by that route instead?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend presupposes that the Cabinet would be prepared to do that. According to the newspapers today, the Deputy Prime Minister—the trade union shop steward on behalf of the Cabinet—takes a dim view of such pay restraint. My hon. Friend nevertheless makes a good point in comparison.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North–East made a strong case about the durability of vellum. I wonder how many hon. Members have taken visitors to the other place to see the showcase of significant Acts of Parliament and other parliamentary documents. One of my great delights in showing people those is to say, "That is not a facsimile, copy or replica. That is the Act of Parliament, dating back to 1497, which bears the signature of the King—and it survives to this day." I do not believe that that tradition should be tossed aside lightly.

People who see those documents are in awe. The death warrant of Charles I is there—not a copy or facsimile, but the actual document. Who is to say whether archival paper would survive for 300 or 500 years? The jury has to be out, and none of us will be here to act as the jury to find out whether it works. Therefore, we should not take a chance, and we should stick with vellum, which has proved that it can survive over time.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East is a computer specialist. I understand that computers do crash, and that they are not made from such robust material as vellum. It would be a foolish House—which has the stewardship of these matters for future generations—to entrust the records of the proceedings of our times to a bit of plastic that might not stand the test of time, and to do so in the full knowledge that vellum does stand the test of time and has lasted for 500 years.

Mr. White: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, while it is right to be able to see the vellum next door, it is also right to be able to see the same Act of Parliament whether one is in Australia, Northumberland or wherever? The two go together; they are not incompatible.

Mr. Howarth: Yes, I accept that point.

This is a House of Commons matter, not a Government matter, but what has happened has been very much in the tradition of the way in which the Government like to handle matters. I believe in tradition. I see no good reason why we should dispense with vellum. Indeed, I see grave risks in our doing so and entrusting ourselves to the world of the computer. I shall vote against the motion.

4.50 pm

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): The outside world will be looking on in amazement at our debate on this issue when, for instance, the debate on agriculture was arbitrarily stopped at 7 o'clock the other night when numerous hon. Members still wanted to talk about the largest farming crisis since the 1930s.

My interests are declared in the Register: I was previously in the leather business and there is some connection with the trade in vellum. I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). I, too, believe in tradition. It is sad that we are wilfully throwing away a material that works. That is the first thing to be said in praise of vellum: it has worked since the middle ages. There is no track record of 500 or 1,000 years to let us know whether archival paper will work.

Why not leave matters where they stand? A few technical criticisms were thrown at vellum. As I understand it from the leather conservation centre in Northampton, vellum can be taken down to 0.4 mm to 0.5 mm. That is as thin as archival paper and would do the job just as well. There are no practical problems.

Cost has been spoken of, but let us consider the £30,000 against the £1 billion that the Government are spending on extra government in organisations, spin doctors and general hangers-on. It would probably not cover half the expense account for six months of one of the Government's more glossy and glamorous spin doctors. The easiest way of reducing the bill of £11,000 on the Finance Bill is to have a shorter Bill; it is far too long and far too much government is enacted in the House without enough scrutiny. I regret the fact that we are considering this issue rather than welfare, for example.

I shall vote for tradition and for keeping a material with a splendid track record going back to the middle ages, and one that keeps a tiny business in the constituency of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. White) going. If the contract is withdrawn, I suspect that several of the 10 or a dozen people involved will be on the dole and the British taxpayer will pick up a larger bill than the £30,000 that this stingy, miserable, petty report says that we will save.

4.53 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) for so ably moving the motion and to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) for his spirited contribution.

This is clearly a matter for the House to decide. Last week, the House had the opportunity to discuss the history, tradition and precedence of parliamentary privilege. Today, we have the opportunity to discuss parliamentary history again. Many of our practices date from experience in the 19th century. Altering an 1849 resolution about the record copies of Acts is not something that we would want to do without mature consideration, and we have had some of that this afternoon.

I am aware of some hon. Members' concerns that this may not be the best use of parliamentary time, but it is essential that the legislation be enacted by the end of the Session if it is to take effect in time for the first Act of 2000. On 16 June, the other place approved the second report from the House of Lords Offices Committee, which recommended that the record copies of Acts of Parliament kept in the House of Lords Record Office should be printed on archival paper instead of vellum, with effect from the first Act of 2000.

It was also agreed that the supply of a duplicate copy for the Public Record Office should cease. The Public Record Office consented to that and believes that its services will not be affected.

We are indebted to the Administration Committee for looking into the matter, and it recommended that record copies of Acts should be preserved on archival paper rather than vellum. As we have heard, substantial cost savings can be made.

In the other place a fortnight ago, one peer said that he thought that the records should go straight to CD-Rom. Such is the pace of technological change that I imagine that—unlike its predecessor, the 1849 Act—any new resolution agreed in 1999 will not survive unamended for 150 years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North–East referred to the effect of the change on a small firm in his constituency. I understand that it is the only firm in the United Kingdom with the necessary skills, and it is important to acknowledge the craftsmanship with which that firm has preserved our legislative work over all those years, and to thank it for that work. We should also acknowledge the service done by my hon. Friend over recent weeks in pursuing his constituents' case so vigorously.

Despite my hon. Friend's comments, and the concerns that he raised, it seems sensible to make the change in time for the first Act of Parliament of the next millennium. That would be a modest piece of modernisation in line with the Government's objective of improving the quality as well as the form of legislation, and I commend the report to the House.

4.57 pm

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful for the opportunity to respond briefly to a couple of the points made during the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. White) made a passionate and effective defence of the interests of his local company. I have resolved that, if I am ever defeated in Broxtowe, I shall move to Milton Keynes, so as to get the benefit of my hon. Friend's advocacy.

On the specific issue of consultation, I can tell my hon. Friend that the Administration Committee tries to abide by the terms of the Ibbs report, which means that we rarely take evidence in open session. We ask the Officers of the House to make inquiries, to discuss matters and to correspond with companies, as was done in the case in question.

I confirm that members of the Administration Committee were apprised of the contents of the letters from William Cowley, and had the opportunity to bring the issue back to the Committee before the decision was published. We decided that we were still satisfied with the case.

Mr. White: How many times did the Committee discuss with the supplier the issues of substance in the report?

Dr. Palmer: As I said, the Committee does not normally take direct evidence in session from companies or individuals, but our officers corresponded with the supplier; as my hon. Friend will know, there was a substantial correspondence on the subject.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: How long has the firm been under contract to the House?

Dr. Palmer: I am afraid that I do not have that information, but I shall be happy to supply the hon. Gentleman with it when I get hold of it after the debate.

As for durability, several hon. Members drew attention to the fact that, in principle, vellum will last for perhaps 1,500 years, and archival paper for between 500 and 1,000 years, or even, perhaps, 2,000 years. They argued that that was the crucial element. However, as I said earlier, the important question is not only the survival of the original documents but the security with which documents are kept, and the availability of computer back-up.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) said that that was not a viable argument because computers crash. However, Members who work more actively with computers will agree that storage, especially storage of documents available on the internet, is not affected by the crash of any individual personal computer such as the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members may own. We are talking about long-term storage with thorough back-up facilities, as thorough as those used by the Bank of England or other established bodies to secure the long-term viability of data.

Several hon. Members suggested that £30,000 is not a very large sum. Opposition Members attempted to ride with the hounds and run with the fox by attacking the Government for alleged overspending while recognising that the report is from an all-party Committee. I pointed out earlier that the availability of many more firms able to work with archival paper is likely to produce substantial savings of a kind that will be familiar to Opposition Members. It is unfortunate that they have presented their case as a partisan attack on the Government, and that approach will not benefit them in the vote.

It was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East and the hon. Member for Aldershot that it would be a shame to lose our foothold in an industry in which Britain is a leader in the world. Valuable though it may be to be the leader in the world in printing on goatskin, if we are unable to sustain the industry except by subsidising it with unnecessary orders from Parliament, the industry is not sustainable. I believe that that is the view of Ministers and Opposition Front Benchers, and of most hon. Members on both sides of the House. We are not in the business of preserving industries merely for the sake of it.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am concerned by my hon. Friend's reference to subsidy. Does he agree that several valuable industries have been sustained by subsidy and that Britain remains an industrial nation as a result?

Dr. Palmer: My hon. Friend's point would lead us into a broader political debate, but I agree with him that key industries have effects on other industries and need to be preserved during difficult times so that they can survive in the longer term. I suggest that the printing of documents on goatskin is not one of them. I note also that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes,

[Dr. Palmer]

North-East mentioned the need to support British agriculture, but I understand that the goatskins in question come not from Britain but from Morocco.

Mr. White: My hon. Friend has referred to goatskin throughout the debate, but it is calfskin that is used.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful for that correction. In any event, the skins in question do not come from British cows.

The hon. Member for Aldershot, who is the authoritative voice in this House of the 19th century—and earlier centuries—noted the value of the death warrant of Charles I. I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that any future royal death warrants will not be put on archival paper. The motion refers only to Acts of Parliament.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am grateful for that explanation. However, should some measure that is not an Act of Parliament require the approval of the House, from where will we get the material?

Dr. Palmer: In the event of a future royal death warrant or other matter, we might exceptionally violate the call of the Leader of the Opposition and import the material from France.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) argued that Finance Bills are too long. That is a non-party issue, which goes beyond the current debate, but I suggest that the way to shorten Finance Bills is not necessarily to preserve them on animal skin.

The hon. Gentleman also pleaded the case of tradition. Let me give a serious response to the arguments about preserving tradition. I do respect the traditions of the House and those of the country. I believe that we should support traditions that are in keeping with our concept of Britain today, but to preserve a tiny industry that prints on animal hide for the sake of tradition alone does not seem to me sensible, and would not be understood by our constituents as sensible.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 53, Noes 121.

Division No. 279] **[5.6 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bermingham, Gerald
Boateng, Paul
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dowd, Jim
Foulkes, George
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hill, Keith
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Ruane, Chris
Sarwar, Mohammad
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Stevenson, George
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Walter, Robert
Webb, Steve
Worthington, Tony
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Nick Palmer and Mr. Andrew Miller.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Barnes, Harry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bercow, John
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gill, Christopher
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Healey, John
Heppell, John
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Mountford, Kali
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prosser, Gwyn
Rapson, Syd
Robathan, Andrew
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soames, Nicholas
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David

Wells, Bowen
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Winnick, David
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kelvin Hopkins and
Mr. Brian White.

Question accordingly negatived.

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Andrew George be discharged from the Agriculture Committee and Mr. Richard Livsey be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Tyler, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Fabricant be discharged from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and Miss Julie Kirkbride be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Tyler, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Paul Keetch be discharged from the Education and Employment Committee and Dr. Evan Harris be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Tyler, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. David Heath be discharged from the Foreign Affairs Committee and Mr. David Chidgey be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Tyler, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Dr. Jenny Tonge be discharged from the International Development Committee and Mr. Nigel Jones be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Tyler, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Michael Moore be discharged from the Scottish Affairs Committee and Sir Robert Smith be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Tyler, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Yugoslavia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

5.17 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Had this debate started at 10 o'clock, I would have spoken for a succinct six minutes, and shared the time available with my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). I went in September to Serbia—the subject of this debate on the reconstruction of the Balkans—with my hon. Friend, and with Tim Gopsill of the National Union of Journalists and Bob Oram of Unison Manchester. However, as it is 5.17 pm, I should like to use the opportunity to talk quietly and seriously to my political friend of 30 years, the Under-Secretary of State for International Development. It is no use pretending that there are not deep and rancorous differences of opinion on the Balkan war between myself and the Secretary of State for International Development. What has actually been said can be left at that, although it would be nice if there were a reconsideration as time goes by.

The best way of presenting my case is to give a chronological description of the visit. The first question is who paid for it. Did the Serbs? No, they did not. We paid for it; in no way are we beholden to the Serbian Government.

Because Belgrade airport is covered by sanctions, we arrived, as everyone has to, at Budapest. One has to have transport provided by Serbian authorities, or one does not go. We were met by a senior official of the Serbian embassy in Budapest. That led to several interesting conversations. We were very blunt and said that dreadful things had happened; we never hid that. For example, there was a dreadful occurrence at Rachak. I report his reply to the House. He said that Rachak was awful, but that there had been a terrible occurrence at Waco and asked whether we would condemn a whole nation for what happened there? Would we arraign in court Mrs. Janet Reno, the Attorney-General of the United States, simply because a terrible thing happened?

I do not say that this is the whole story, but the Serbian people deeply resent the fact that they have been blamed when they have more refugees than anywhere else in Europe. Some put the figure at 800,000, some at more than 1 million, starting with the 200,000 Krajina Serbs. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax will deal at some length with the refugees, so I shall leave that and consider what happened on our first visit, which was to Novi Sad.

We were met by Professor Budhakov, who got his doctorate at the university of Nashville in the United States and went on to do research at the university of Pittsburgh. There were no language problems and no deep-seated hatred of the west or anything of that sort. Here was a man who was deeply hurt at what had happened. My hon. Friend the Minister has not had the opportunity of going to Novi Sad; I understand that. It is not only that there are bridges down over the Danube. Pictures cannot convey the sheer horror of seeing those bridges dumped there.

That point leads me to my first question: what do the Government think that our obligations are to the countries that lie on this greatest of European arteries? I refer to Bulgaria and Romania in particular. Later, we went to the

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

ministry of reconstruction in Belgrade. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax will bear out the fact that the people there said the bridges would not be cleared until they got a clear offer on the table in deutschmarks, not only for clearance but for reconstruction costs.

I understand that eight major bridges were destroyed out of the 11 targeted. One cannot be certain about the costs, but I saw an estimate that the cost of destroying them was about £6 million. We were given a rough estimate of £10 million per bridge for reconstruction. In my opinion, and this was also the opinion of my colleagues, the Serbs are determined not to mend the bridges until NATO comes up with a clear, watertight, firm offer that payment will be made.

Secondly, what happens in the winter, when the ice forms? What happens when there is severe flooding down river, as we have been told could occur? I hope that, in his answer—like me, he will have plenty of time—my hon. Friend the Minister will make some serious comments on the state of negotiations between the British Government and the Danube commission.

However, the worst thing at Novi Sad was not the bridges; it was the bombing of the oil refinery. I repeat the question that was eloquently put by the Finn, Dr. Pekka Haavisto. He asked whether, in modern warfare, it is really acceptable to bomb oil refineries and chemical complexes. We must answer that question. At the oil refinery at Novi Sad, no one knows how long the ammonia, benzene, chlorine, mercury, phosgene, pyralene, and many other chemicals and chemical compounds will last; no one knows where they have gone, and how they got into the Danube water. It is not merely a matter of what happens just after the bombing; the chemicals get into the silt at the side of the river, and can last for an extremely long time. I hope that the Minister's brief contains some scientific advice as to [illegible] on groundwater.

We have turned an awful, local crisis into a Balkan catastrophe. As my notes confirm, the Prime Minister and other Ministers repeatedly stated from the Dispatch Box that we would rebuild the Balkans. As of the end of September, there was not much sign of that in Serbia. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax has been to Kosovo and will talk about Kosovo. Perhaps the Government have a good story to tell—as they perceive it—but very little is happening in relation to Serbia. Whether we like it or not, Serbia was the economic engine of the Balkans. How one can rebuild the Balkans without rebuilding Serbia is beyond the imagination.

At Novi Sad, we came across the first instance of the taste of unemployment. In the second city of Yugoslavia, we were told that 30,000 people were now out of work; many were earning only two fifths of the not very great wages that they received before the start of the conflict. The economic situation is horrendous. The following day of our visit was—if anything—even worse. We arrived in Belgrade, late at night, and, in the morning, were taken to the motor vehicle factory at Zastava, about 100 miles south of Belgrade. That was the site of the motor and vehicle industry, manufacturing the Yugo, not only for the whole of Yugoslavia, but for areas beyond that country.

I have some notion about motor vehicle factories; for 25 years of my life as a Member of Parliament, I was immersed in the problems of the British Leyland truck and tractor division at Bathgate. To put it bluntly, I know my way around motor vehicle factories.

The area of Zastava was seven times greater than that of the plant at Bathgate. I do not pretend that it was the most modern motor vehicle factory on the face of the planet: by modern motor vehicle production standards, much of the machinery was rather old and we saw none of the robots or other technology used at Sunderland and Dagenham. Nevertheless, that machinery provided the bread and butter for 130,000 workers. We had a long session with the trade union representatives, whom I found to be both sad and impressive. They wondered what the winter would bring to a town in an area that is wholly dependent on the motor industry—where else were they to obtain the means to support themselves?

What are our obligations, if any, in the rebuilding of that motor industry? I do not know any western motor company that would look at Zastava and I suspect that the machinery is not repairable. There is a vast number of unemployed skilled people in the middle of central Europe. We were told repeatedly throughout the conflict that it was taking place in Europe and that we had an obligation. The point was made that, unlike Chechnya, Yugoslavia is so near to us that we had an obligation to act. What are we going to do about the massive problems at Zastava?

Is there to be some sort of conference, as the trade union leaders would like? They asked us, semi-humorously, but in earnest, where better for an international conference such as we were promised to be held than on the site of the Zastava plant?

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for interrupting the flow of his speech, but I have a point of order that is relevant to the end of the Adjournment debate. On Wednesday, the House is to have a guillotine motion on the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill and there is some suggestion that the Government are modifying the way in which they will deal with certain clauses relating to national insurance for those working through a limited company—it is known as IR35 in general parlance. I have been contacted by constituents and others asking what the Government's intentions are—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. That is not a point of order to be dealt with now, but a matter to be debated when those issues come before the House.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have dealt with the point of order. We should return to the Adjournment debate, which is on an important matter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Without intending any discourtesy to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), may I ask on what occasion the

Government will be able to make available to the House the information that they will otherwise introduce on Wednesday in a guillotine motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter to be dealt with by me at this stage of this evening's business.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the same point of order?

Mr. Bottomley: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it an entirely different point of order?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes. At the end of this debate, the House will have adjourned and there will be no opportunity available to the Government today; that leaves only tomorrow, Tuesday. Hon. Members and those outside the House will have only overnight to consider any proposals the Government make. It would be appropriate for Ministers who have heard these exchanges to consider the matter and return to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have no doubt that Ministers on the Treasury Bench have heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but that is not a matter for me at this time.

Mr. Dalyell: We returned from Zastava to Belgrade the following day. It is incredible what technological weapons have done to a modern European capital such as Belgrade. We experienced great difficulty repairing parts of Manchester after the bomb damage there. It cost £60 million to repair the Bishopsgate building. Throughout the centre of Belgrade, huge, solid buildings of the Austro-Hungarian empire are reduced to unsafe rubble and twisted metal.

Is the Serb capital city to remain in that state? If so, we have some moral obligations; if not, who will start paying for it? Will there be an international effort, or will we leave Belgrade to deteriorate and thus become infinitely more expensive to repair and a greater technical problem than it otherwise would have been? Does my hon. Friend the Minister believe that we have such obligations? We must always bear in mind that the House was told time and again that we had no quarrel with the people of Serbia. On that basis, the House—apart from very few of us—assented to military action. Therefore, I am entitled to probe Government thinking.

Our first meeting in Belgrade was with Dr. Leposana Milicevic, the Minister of Health, who is a distinguished doctor. She told us that we should not imagine that the graphite bombs aimed at power stations simply knocked out the power for a short time; they created all sorts of other problems. Those for the health service were incredible. For example, Dr. Milicevic told us that 4,000 people were on kidney dialysis. What happens when not only the main but the auxiliary power supplies are knocked out?

All sorts of other medical problems were pointed out to us. For example, hospitals were hit. I do not doubt that that was unintentional, and I appreciate that much of the precision bombing was remarkably precise, but collateral damage is inevitable. We must consider whether modern aerial warfare is justified in the long term when one has no quarrel with the people of the country being bombed. That was the basis on which the bombing commenced.

We visited the Red Cross in Belgrade, and its presentation made it clear that we must confront collateral damage and not only short-term, but long-term damage. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax, the representative of Unison and I think that the problems in hospitals are likely to be acute for a long time, not only because of the damage done to medical cases, but because of the trauma effect. The bombing that took place night after night was traumatic for a whole generation.

How does the west intend to mend its fences with the Serb people? The answer might be, "They brought it all on themselves", but I do not think that the problem is as simple as that. There are two sides to the story. My hon. Friend the Minister may deal in some depth with the reports in the Sunday press yesterday that suggested that the numbers of those executed in Kosovo were markedly fewer than were claimed in my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's statement to the House, which suggested that there had been mass genocide. I am not jumping to conclusions, but there will be a briefing on yesterday's reports in *The Sunday Times*. Will the Minister give us the Government's reaction to the briefing? Is *The Sunday Times* justified in saying that the number of people executed was markedly fewer than the Foreign Secretary asserted, or was my right hon. Friend justified in talking in terms of genocide?

We must also consider a Serb view of events, so I shall describe what was said to us and ask for a Government comment. The Serbs said that the Albanians, who live in very large families, made group decisions to send one or two family members to Germany. In Germany, they worked as Gastarbeiter where they earned—let us say—DM2,000 a month. They lived very frugally and the overwhelming proportion of that money was remitted to their Albanian families. Therefore, a family soon had sufficient deutschmarks to buy a house in a village in Kosovo. When the Serb owner of a house refused the first offer of market value, the Albanians said that they would offer double the market value. That was very tempting, because such an offer would enable a Serb family to buy a house in Belgrade, send a child to the university there and better themselves.

That process was repeated once or twice in the same village. As the Albanians came in, other houses could be bought quite easily at market price and the rest would be sold dead cheap because, by that time, the Serbs felt that they had to get out. Their children were bullied at school and they faced all kinds of social pressures. Therefore, the cradle of Serb civilisation—whether we like it or not, that is how the Serbs see it—systematically went over to what I was going to call Albanians. However, I had better be careful. In general, the Kosovo Albanians were not blamed, because people who had come from Albania—they had doubtless fled from the odious Enver Hoxha—took over that part of Kosovo. I mention that, because the question is not one of good and bad; it is one of varying shades of grey. Therefore, simply to say that the Serbs deserved all that they got is just not the reality.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): My hon. Friend mentioned the report in *The Sunday Times*. I suggest that he looks at yesterday's edition of *The Observer*,

[Mr. David Winnick]

which describes in graphic detail the horrifying atrocities that were committed by Serb paramilitaries against innocent people—why our intervention was absolutely necessary. My hon. Friend spoke about the Serbians feeling out-manoeuvred by Kosovo Albanians, but does he not realise that that is precisely the same argument used in this country by racists and white supremacists, who talk of being swamped, and so on, by immigrants who are undermining British culture and British civilisation? In giving the Serb point of view—the Milosevic point of view, to be more accurate—he is giving the impression that he is campaigning on what the racists, from whom I know he dissociates himself, have been campaigning over many years in our country.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not think that it is as simple as that. The people who made such complaints were as anti-Milosevic as one could find. They had demonstrated, day after day, in the streets of Belgrade. I wish that they had had rather more help from the west when doing so some years ago.

The problems of the Balkans are not in black and white. This debate is about the future. I am trying to pre-empt the argument that the Serbs deserved all that they got. That is not a fair way of looking at a very complex problem.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): I assure my hon. Friend that he does not need to pre-empt that argument because I do not intend to advance it.

Mr. Dalyell: I am glad that we have got that out of the way, because certain people in the press have put around, "Hell mend the Serbs! As long as they keep Milosevic, we have no obligations." I think that we have some obligations, and it is the purpose of this Adjournment debate to try to elicit what they are.

5.48 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for being so generous in sharing his debate with me. I endorse many of his comments, particularly those on the demonisation of the Serbs and the way in which they have been blamed—quite unfairly—for every ill in the Balkans.

On Thursday, in business questions, I raised the persecution of Serbs, and called for a debate. We had just read the latest story of a column of 150 Serbs who were leaving Kosovo when they were attacked, and their vehicles set alight, by ethnic Albanians. *Hansard* is incorrect: I said, and should like to put on record, that nearly 1,000 people had been killed or abducted since the KFOR occupation, but *Hansard* states 100.

As my hon. Friend said, I went with him and other colleagues to Serbia to see first hand the effects of the NATO bombings on the civilian population and to get some idea of the need for humanitarian aid and economic reconstruction. That was necessary because the plight of Serbia proper has been almost entirely ignored by the media. Western Governments have imposed sanctions that have been designed specifically to prevent the reconstruction of civilian infrastructure, even though, as my hon. Friend said, we were constantly told that the war was not aimed at the ordinary Serbian people.

We were told that the sanctions were imposed for specific reasons. According to a House of Commons Library briefing that I received today, the British Government imposed sanctions unilaterally and participated in the multilateral imposition of sanctions under the auspices of the United Nations and the European Union. The reason behind the imposition of sanctions by the UN, the EU and the British Government has always been linked to a lack of democratic government and grave human rights abuses by the Government of Serbia. Further, the current basis for the EU sanctions, at least against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, is laid out in the most recent regulation, which was adopted by the Council on 4 October, amending the prohibition of the sale and supply of oil and oil products.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Lady is reaching a point that I wanted to touch on. She knows that I do not entirely agree with her and the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about the conduct of the conflict, but the Balkan winter is as cold for Serbs as it is for Kosovan Albanians. What assessment was she able to make of the adequacy of fuel supplies to enable people to get through the winter with reasonable heating? Does the sanctions regime need to be amended further to enable that to happen?

Mrs. Mahon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I shall talk about that later, but, clearly, oil sanctions are hitting hard. We have some graphic photographs of people having to buy petrol to get to Kragujevac and other places. There is none in state petrol stations. People have to buy it on the black market, on the street corner. It was interesting because almost everyone selling it was smoking a cigarette, as were the people buying it. I have photographs of that and it was horrifying. There are serious implications for heating, for hospitals and for everything else, as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said.

On the legal basis for sanctions, the EU cites as justification continued violations by the Yugoslav Government of UN resolutions and the pursuit of extreme and criminally irresponsible policies, including repression against its own citizens, which constitutes serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Can we have some examples? What on earth does that mean? What precisely are the continued violations by the Yugoslav Government of the UN Security Council resolutions? Can the Minister give us examples because, at the moment, the people who are being persecuted, killed, having their homes burned and who are being made into refugees are the Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo. Nearly 100,000 have been ethnically cleansed from Kosovo since the NATO occupation.

The Minister will be aware of the demonstrations by Opposition parties in Yugoslavia, which want early elections. They are perfectly entitled to do that, but those demonstrations take place regularly and freely. I have not seen any of the over-the-top policing that I saw the other week when the Chinese President came to this country. Peaceful protesters were treated in a fairly rough manner by our police.

A friend of mine, a member of the Committee for Peace in the Balkans, went to Serbia after we went. She attended four demonstrations. She said:

"In spite of media reports to the contrary, we witnessed no beatings and no police brutality."

She said that she saw one or two fights in the crowds and the police stopped them, but she witnessed no beatings or police brutality. She took photographs. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) can choose to believe that, or not. A very good friend of mine, whom I trust, saw it with her own eyes. When we were in Serbia, we witnessed no police brutality.

We are told by the west that there are no political prisoners—certainly, Amnesty International is not badgering us about political prisoners in Yugoslavia. The opposition media operate with restrictions, but they are no greater—I have been looking the details up; I am a member of the North Atlantic Assembly—than some that we found when we visited Croatia in April 1998. At that time, we met the opposition media there, who complained about the state-run media and described what a bad time they were having. We recommended that Forum 21, the opposition media, be given more freedoms and should not be harassed, and that Croatia did something about the lack of press freedom there.

It is the hypocrisy of the west sometimes that needs to be exposed, and this is the place to expose it. On political prisoners, during a visit by the North Atlantic Assembly to Turkey in February 1998, we tried to see the members of Hadep, who were Members of the Turkish Parliament, who were sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on charges of separatism and membership of a terrorist organisation. Immunity was lifted and they were sent to prison.

Those members include Lena Zana, the recipient of the Sakharov prize for human rights of the European Parliament and a well-known campaigner for the rights of the Kurds. The unconditional release of Mrs. Zana and her colleagues has been demanded by several interparliamentary organisations, including the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, as well as the European Parliament. There is something seriously wrong when we live with that and carry on dialogue with the Turkish Government, despite all the human rights abuses that we have seen there, including the imprisonment of elected representatives, yet bring that out about the Yugoslav Government.

Sanctions do hurt ordinary people. There will be enormous suffering in Yugoslavia this winter. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has confirmed that Yugoslavia has the largest concentration of refugees in Europe. We visited some; we visited some of the Roma people. They include not just Serbs from Kosovo—Yugoslavia has hundreds and thousands of Serbs from the Krajina, Serbs from Bosnia, and also other minorities.

We visited Roma in the camp. I do not like going to refugee camps. I hate staring at people who are already living in absolute misery. It is a dreadful thing to do, but sometimes we have to make ourselves do it. Lots of people visited the refugee camps in Kosovo. I thank NATO. It was fairly well organised after the initial bad start, but people are not getting that sort of help in Serbia. Some groups do not naturally have a family in Serbia—not only Roma, but Turks, Bosniaks and Jews. Jews are being expelled. Can hon. Members believe that, in this day and age, Jewish families have had to leave Kosovo because it was not safe and because they were warned?

We visited those people. It is difficult to do. They are living in converted school rooms, barracks and factories. Entire families have been squeezed into single-room accommodation. Many were expelled from the Krajina and Bosnia; they have been there for years and their plight is difficult.

Mr. Winnick: I have much admiration for my hon. Friend, but it saddens me that she has allowed herself, in many respects, to act as a spokesperson for the regime in Serbia. I would be glad to have her comments on the following point. Milosevic instigated wars that have led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. He lost those wars, and the Serbian people, to a large extent, as well as others, are paying the penalty.

With regard to the position in Serbia, I draw her attention to the murder of a journalist during the conflict, a murder that was undoubtedly instigated by the Belgrade authorities. No effort has been made, understandably, to find the murderers. It would be useful if the Committee for Peace in the Balkans, of which she is the chair, denounced such crimes and put the blame for them, as well as for what has happened in the past eight or nine years, where it belongs—on a Milosevic clique.

Mrs. Mahon: I am sorry that I gave way to my hon. Friend, as some of his remarks were unworthy of him. He knows perfectly well that any committee that I might belong to would condemn murder, and I am outraged that he thinks that the situation might be otherwise. I hope that, on reflection, he will decide to apologise for those remarks.

The press has ignored the plight of the hundreds of thousands of refugees in Serbia. Although all the refugees are not Serbs—there are many other minority groups among the refugees—Serbs comprise the vast majority of them, and the conditions in which they are living are very bad. Many of the refugees have no family support and, unfortunately, are receiving very little help from aid agencies.

Will the Minister tell the House what aid the Department for International Development is giving to the Yugoslav Government? The Yugoslav Government have to deal with the victims not only of the recent NATO war, but of the previous war—in which the Croats, with NATO's help, expelled hundreds and thousands of people from the Krajina. I have seen those refugees for myself; shamefully, the Red Cross seemed to be the only aid agency helping them. Red Cross workers told us that their soup kitchens are able to feed only a third of the worst-off refugees—100,000 of 300,000 people.

Another problem, which the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned, is power cuts. Although there were power cuts while we were there, the problem will become much worse as temperatures drop and the demand for power grows.

The power shortages caused directly by NATO's bombing are seriously affecting health care in Yugoslavia. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said, heating for homes and hospitals has been curtailed. Schools will also have to close because of power shortages. As we all know, elderly people will suffer as temperatures drop as low as minus 20 deg C.

[Mrs. Mahon]

Even *The Guardian*, which has been almost as warlike on the subject as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North, has now said that sanctions should be eased. It is interesting that it should now be coming round to that view. It stated:

"The US, ignoring the lessons of Iraq, continues to insist that tough economic sanctions, including fuel oil, must be maintained. It believes this will spur the Serbian populace to mass revolt as winter exacerbates its misery."

The Guardian, like everyone else who thinks about the matter, concludes that the Serbian people will have to try to survive the winter and that all their energies will be spent in attaining that one goal. Nevertheless, we are very grateful for its support in calling for sanctions to be lifted.

About £52 million has gone to help refugees in Kosovo, with which I shall deal in a moment as I was fortunate enough to visit it in late September. Although that money is desperately needed in Kosovo, where the housing situation is awful—people must have decent accommodation to cope with the winter—it dwarfs the aid that has been provided to Serbia. It is disgraceful that, although everyone knows about Serbia's huge refugee problem, people who raise money for Kosovo say not a word about the Serbs. The west really will have to answer for the way it has demonised the Serbs, almost creating a hatred of them, so that we do not think of them as deserving.

What miserable Serb-hating group dreamed up the policy of providing oil only to Serbian cities that vote for Opposition parties? It takes a sick mentality to think that because a town votes in a certain way, its children and its sick and elderly people should starve in freezing temperatures, whereas those voting in another way should have access to oil.

It is absolutely sickening that, in the oil for democracy scheme, the European Union should try to boost Serb Opposition parties by promising that, if President Milosevic were ousted from power, it would not only rapidly lift sanctions but, after five years, press Croatia to take back Serb refugees. Although Croatia has been a member of the Council of Europe since the Krajina Serbs were expelled, Europe has only now decided to press the Croatians to take back the refugees. I wonder what Europe has been doing meanwhile about Croatia's continuing disgraceful treatment of Serbs.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Does the hon. Lady conclude that the continuation of sanctions against Serbia has more to do with the ousting of Milosevic than with any other single objective? Why else should we be continuing to impose sanctions?

Mrs. Mahon: I do not think that Milosevic will be ousted soon. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to suggest that that is the main objective of sanctions. If that is not the main objective, we would simply be taking revenge against 10 million people.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend has been to Kosovo, and I have not; nevertheless, I have been told by responsible people—senior people in the British Army—that the situation in Kosovo is such that only the Irish Guards conduct night patrols; that, without night patrols, one cannot provide any protection of Serb minorities; and that only elite units of British regiments are doing anything to fulfil the undertaking that Serb minorities will be protected—for, without night patrols, we can do nothing. Although I understand perfectly well Mr. Bernard Kouchner's remark that we cannot put a soldier or policeman behind every Serb in Kosovo, nevertheless, the general situation is such that the impression has been given that KFOR is either unable or unwilling—or a bit of both—to provide protection to such Serbs as remain.

Mrs. Mahon: I am able to confirm what my hon. Friend says about the Irish Guards being the only group to conduct night patrols, because, on my visit, I made a point of speaking to some of those soldiers. I think that it is a good idea to talk to the ordinary soldiers, and not only to those who give the briefings—with which I shall deal shortly.

The sanctions are a crime against humanity and should be lifted immediately. As the war continued, the civilian infrastructure was smashed deliberately by NATO bombs, to terrorise the civilian population. More than 1,500 Serb civilians were killed, and 4,000 were injured. There was damage to 27 hospitals and clinics, and I have a photograph and a dossier on each of them. Although it was called collateral damage, the fact is that schools, factories, bridges, roads and Government buildings were destroyed. The damage amounted to £40 billion.

Kragujevac—which is home of the destroyed car factory described by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow—was hit by 22 cruise missiles, injuring 120 people and utterly destroying the living not only of the factory's 36,000 workers, but of those who worked in the 47 factories supplying it with components. The devastation has affected the livelihood of more than 120,000 people living in the area.

Kragujevac's local health centre was one of the medical centres damaged. The town relies on the factory's power plant for winter heating. We were told that the whole city has stopped, that people are living on Government hand-outs, and that refugees are still pouring in. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said, all its hospitals have been affected by power shortages: dialysis machines are not working; powered wheelchairs have stopped; incubators do not work; operations have been cancelled; and children and elderly people who have been traumatised by the bombing are suffering badly.

I visited Kosovo on 25 September as part of the North Atlantic Assembly. My conclusion from that visit—which was not denied by anybody we spoke to—was that Kosovo was being ethnically cleansed of all minorities. We hear different figures. UNHCR said that 50,000 Serbs and other ethnic minorities had left Kosovo, KFOR said nearly 100,000 and somebody else said 120,000. I think that the generally accepted figure is around 100,000. The scale of the ethnic cleansing, with daily murders, arson attacks and other accompanying forms of intimidation, led us to conclude that KFOR is not protecting the minorities. It did not pretend to us that it was.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North talked about the journalist who was killed. I condemn that out of hand. I should like him to condemn an unprovoked attack in the centre of Pristina on a United Nations peace worker, who was taken away by the mob and shot in the head because when somebody asked him the time he

answered in Serbo-Croat. He was killed simply for speaking that language. The hatred is not all on one side and both sides have many things to answer for.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. Lady will understand that those of us who are here do not want to affect the debate or criticise what she or her hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) have said. However, I should like to point out that over the past eight years Mr. Milosevic and Serbia have carried out a succession of military interventions in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, with the threat of going beyond that. The context of the debate is that Mr. Milosevic ordered his forces into Kosovo and eventually ordered them out again.

Mrs. Mahon: The hon. Gentleman is right. There was a war going on in Kosovo. The first research note in the House of Commons Library from before we went to war with Yugoslavia is even-handed about the Serbs and Albanians being killed. I recommend that paper to him, because it makes good reading. The Serb army was fighting the KLA in Kosovo. No member of the KLA has been indicted for war crimes. Indeed, Agim Ceku, the KLA commander who is being investigated for his role in the ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Croatia, has recently been appointed to lead the so-called Kosovo protection force, which is just another name for the KLA. The appointment by the UN of a man who could well be indicted for war crimes is hardly calculated to reassure Kosovo's minorities that they will be safe.

Mr. Dalyell: I should like to return to my hon. Friend's previous point about the UN official. His name was Valentin Krumov. The circumstances were outlined on 13 October by Laura Rozen on page 12 of *The Independent*. She says that he was brutally killed

> "as he went for a walk outside the Grand Hotel, on Pristina's main thoroughfare, and reportedly replied in Serbian when asked what the time was by a group of Albanians."

If officials or the Minister have some reference to make to that case, it would be helpful to have it at the end of the debate. If not, perhaps he could write to us.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank my hon. Friend for that. I refer the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North to the second assessment of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe of the situation of ethnic minorities in Kosovo. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told us on 18 June to read the report about the atrocities committed by the Serbs against the Albanians. There is little difference between the two—they both involve people killing each other in the most horrible way. It does the debate no good if we fail to recognise that there were no good guys in the middle of the horrors of the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Our delegation in Kosovo met the some of the Albanian and Serb leaders, although unfortunately two key figures—a bishop and a priest—did not turn up. They have pulled out of the transitional council because of what is happening to the Serbs and other minorities, so I met only one of the Serb leaders. However, we met Hashim Thaci, the self-styled Prime Minister of Kosovo—a man whom my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary rang up regularly to get information about what was happening in Kosovo. From the evidence in the Library of 52 reports of killings and massacres received during the war, 42 were received from the KLA or the Kosovo press, which are hardly independent sources. As we know, some of those reports have since been proved to be lies.

We put questions to Mr. Thaci. We doubted that he was doing anything to stop the daily violence against the minorities, yet KFOR seemed to treat him as the Prime Minister in waiting. Opinion polls, including one in the *Washington Post* recently, say that Mr. Rugova, the moderate leader, has the majority of support, because the ordinary Albanians are sick of the violence that is being perpetrated on their behalf by the KLA.

We met Bernard Kouchner and other UN personnel, as well as senior representatives from the Serb and Albanian communities. We were also briefed by the German general Klaus Reinhart, who has just replaced Mike Jackson. We visited Mitrovica, where there is almost daily confrontation between Albanians and Serbs. There is still a fairly large Serb population in the north of Mitrovica. The saddest sights were the small groups of Serbs and other minorities who were surrounded by tanks. They were prisoners, sometimes in monasteries. They were not allowed to go out for fear of their lives, so they could not lead a normal life. If they ever went out, they were subjected to abduction or killing. The situation is very sad.

Mr. Dalyell: I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 August about Fergal Keane's description of the plight of the Kosovo Serbs. My right hon. Friend replied on 11 October:

> "When I visited Kosovo at the end of July I made a point of seeing the leaders of the Kosovo Serb community and reassuring them that the international community was opposed to ethnic intimidation and violence from whatever origin. I certainly did not 'tiptoe' around the issue as Mr. Keane suggests. In all my contacts with Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb leaders I have left no doubt that nothing excuses ethnic cleansing and that there is no question of our tolerating such abuses."

That is a clear statement from the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

About 70 churches and monasteries have been damaged since the KFOR occupation. We went to Decani—a famous 13th century orthodox monastery where about 40 monks still live. During the bombing, they took in Albanians and looked after them, protecting them at some risk to themselves. For their troubles, they cannot leave the compound and the KLA has put them at the top of their list of targets for destruction. That is a sad story.

Since I came back, my Committee has issued a report. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow was right to say that Bernard Kouchner has said that he cannot put a soldier or policeman behind every Serb. He was pessimistic about the situation.

We heard a lot about the Albanian border, which was left completely unprotected, and arms are still pouring in. Drug trafficking has started again, and the mafia is very active. International representatives, both military and civilian, have said that they expect the risk of terrorism motivated by ethnic and other reasons to increase in the months to come. It is not a good report to put to the North Atlantic Assembly, and it was a sad visit altogether.

We have heard that there must be a democratic press in Yugoslavia before sanctions can be lifted. Yet the press in Kosovo—which is allowed to operate freely—recently

[Mrs. Mahon]

took a dangerous turn with an article condemning Veton Sorroi, a well-known moderate Albanian newspaper owner. The article called him a traitor to the Kosovo Albanian cause and warned that he is at risk of eventual and "very understandable" revenge. The article continued ominously that such "criminals" and "enslaved minds" should not have a place in a free Kosovo. That article created a storm, but the KLA—our allies, and those who would run Kosovo—defended the story, which was published widely in the region.

I wish to refer to the steady stream of revelations coming from Kosovo about the numbers of the dead. Every death and every massacre is to be condemned, whoever has committed it and under whatever circumstances—there is no excuse. All power to the International War Crimes Tribunal if it can find the perpetrators of some of those horrendous massacres. However, I would like to see some more even-handedness, and the same energy and commitment being applied to those who are committing murders and massacres now. I still hope that that will happen.

During the war, we were told by the Foreign Secretary and others why we needed to bomb Yugoslavia. We now find that the leader of the Spanish forensic team which has just returned from Kosovo has said

"we did not find one—not one—mass grave."

I do not know how people define mass graves—I have read of places where 100 bodies have been found. However, the area given to the Spanish team did not contain one such grave.

The claims were extraordinary. I sat in this House when people referred to 150,000 Albanian men who were missing and who could be dead. The implication about their fate was made, and that did nothing to help reasoned debate. According to the Spaniard in charge, 187 bodies were found. He was told first to expect 44,000 bodies, and then 22,000. He was told that his team would be exhuming bodies until November, if not beyond. The figure of bodies was then reduced to 10,000, then to 2,000. Finally, they got down to the real figure, which was 187—many of whom had been killed by NATO bombing. Some had been shot, and some were prisoners in Istok prison, which had been bombed by NATO. He concluded:

"A military action prejudices truth."

We were told that the Trepca mines—this story came up again and again and is referred to in the document put in the Library by the Foreign Secretary—contained 700 bodies. We now find that war crimes investigators found nothing in the shaft of a Kosovo mine where hundreds of bodies were rumoured to be hidden. Nothing was found—not even animal bones. That rumour clouded opinion, and made people less concerned about the effects that the bombing was having on a civilian population—a population that had not declared war on NATO. It has been a terrible tragedy.

My Government and NATO were wrong to bomb Yugoslavia, and history will prove that they were wrong. It has done nothing to help the situation in Kosovo. It has been a tragedy for the surrounding countries, such as Montenegro and Macedonia, which have been destabilised. The Danube has been blocked, and the countries will suffer as the blockage causes floods and continues to interrupt trade. There is also the tragedy of pollution.

Cluster bombs are now killing more people—those who have returned—than during the offensive. Children are having limbs blown off, and 14,500 of those bombs are still to be demined. What we have in Kosovo is a tragedy.

Mr. Dalyell: It was reported under the byline of Robert Fisk in *The Independent* on 16 October that

"Pekka Haavisto, chairman of the UN's Balkan environment task force, says NATO refused to co-operate with his team and that 'immediate action is necessary to obtain information from NATO confirming if, how and where, DU"—

depleted uranium—

"was used during the conflict.'"

Did NATO refuse to co-operate with Haavisto and his team?

My hon. Friend referred to pollution. Has the Department for International Development looked at the analysis of the environmental damage caused by the bombing of chemical and petrochemical industries in Pancevo and Novi Sad. Following a visit to Belgrade by the World Wide Fund for Nature from 27 July to 29 July, a full and detailed report was produced. I shall not read it out, but it is important that the Department looks at this matter—particularly at the chemical reactions at Pancevo.

Mrs. Mahon: My hon. Friend knows that I saw the bombing of Pancevo. The soil was polluted, and some of the pollution has seeped into the waterways. That will be a problem for future generations. We must also get rid of the cluster bombs which, after all, are just land mines that are dropped from the sky. Their legacy remains for years afterwards.

I am not certain that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development is the right Minister to be replying to this debate. I wish the Foreign Secretary had been here, as many of the things that we have referred to concern his Department. I want to assure my hon. Friend the Minister that I too will be watching the programme from Mr. Sweeney about the smiling killer. I am horrified when I see pictures and articles about Kosovo's numbers game. I think that there was such a game, and that it was sad. It clouded the truth, and we should all be against that.

I have pictures and stories about children killed by NATO bombs, and they do not make for pretty reading—nor does the story of the column of 75 men, women and children who were killed while fleeing either bombing or ethnic cleansing.

We should keep the matter in perspective. I wanted a peaceful solution, and we should have trebled the number of verifiers in Kosovo. The conflict could have been prevented but, for reasons best known to itself, NATO wanted to bomb. I am deeply of the opinion that that was the wrong decision, and history will prove me right.

6.30 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I totally disagree with my hon. Friends the Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), as I did during the conflict. As my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax knows, before the recess I raised on a point of order the position of the Serbs in Kosovo and said that it would be appropriate to have a statement. I totally agree that the murder of the United Nations official,

undoubtedly for no other reason than that he answered a question in what appeared to be Serbian language, is to be absolutely deplored.

More recently, I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary asking what action is being taken to bring to justice not only those responsible for the murder of that Bulgarian UN employee, but others who are responsible for the murder of Serbs since the liberation of Kosovo. I have also tabled questions on the matter. Let us be perfectly clear: those of us who supported the war are anxious that the Serbs in Kosovo should be protected. Kosovo was not liberated in order to create a pure ethnic Albanian state. The international community has a responsibility to do everything possible to protect the interests of Serbians in Kosovo. That should be clearly stated from all of us on the Back Benches on both sides of the House, and put on the record.

I disagree with the way in which my two hon. Friends condemn the military action. When the Foreign Secretary made a statement on 18 January about the mass murder of ethnic Albanians, two months before the military action started, I said that there would be no change in the situation until military action was taken and I urged air strikes. Naturally, I supported such action when it was taken. In all the circumstances, it was right for the international community to have taken such action.

My two hon. Friends have spoken about the position of Serbs in Kosovo. No one has suggested that what is happening is organised or instigated by KFOR. It would be madness to advance such a view—if there is a criticism, it is that KFOR is not doing enough to protect the Serbs—but it is entirely clear, despite what my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax has said, that before the liberation there was Serbian state-organised mass murder of ethnic Albanians. We could not turn away in those circumstances, saying that it was a faraway country and none of our business. Therefore, I cannot accept that the military action was not justified.

I do not for one moment question the fact that innocent people died in the air strikes. No one could argue for military action without recognising that civilians will be killed in the process, however much one wishes otherwise. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow admitted that the military action minimised civilian casualties but the fact that anyone was killed is unfortunate, of course. That, however, is the price of going to war, as in the Falklands and in the Gulf. The question is whether we were justified in taking such action. I think that, in this case, we were.

What is so depressing about what my two hon. Friends said is that, to a large extent, they advanced the view of the Milosevic clique. I do not believe that Serbians necessarily take the same view as my hon. Friends. A growing number of Serbians believe that crimes were committed in Kosovo and some, including representatives of the Orthodox Church, have admitted that paramilitaries, no doubt at the instigation of the Serbian leadership, engaged in ethnic cleansing. The crimes could not have been committed without the consent and approval of Belgrade.

Some Serbs also rightly believe that what has happened in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo, which was lost to the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, was caused by the way in which Milosevic took the ultra-nationalist line 10 or 11 years ago. They believe that he is responsible for the break-up of Yugoslavia, the wars and all the innocent casualties about which we know.

Mrs. Mahon: I recently visited Serbia twice and Kosovo once. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow will confirm that we met opposition leaders—people who would not support Milosevic in a million years—and that every single one of them condemned the NATO aggression. Many Serbs admitted that crimes had been committed, but every single Serb and minority person—let us not forget that minorities have been ethnically cleansed, too—condemned NATO aggression. People did not agree with my hon. Friend that it was a good way forward.

Mr. Winnick: I do not believe that it was NATO aggression. If those people admit that such crimes were committed—I am glad that they do—how do they think that that would have ended without the liberation of Kosovo, and how could that liberation have taken place without air strikes, unless ground troops were used, a move that would certainly have escalated the war?

I understand Serbs at the receiving end of the air strikes taking one view, but the international community, of which we are very much a part, took another. The only way in which the mass murders—which the Serbs now accept as having taken place, although a few in this country refuse even now to accept it—could be stopped was by military intervention, and we decided on air strikes rather than all-out war.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The hon. Gentleman and I will probably have to differ about the merits of the air strikes. Does he agree that it is important for the Foreign Secretary to make a full statement soon about the situation in Kosovo and Serbia? Does he feel that it is right for sanctions to continue against all the people of Serbia, including those who are opposed to Milosevic, while Milosevic and his clique will probably be the last to be affected?

Mr. Winnick: As I began by saying, in a point of order before the recess, I asked for a statement from the Foreign Secretary. We will have the opportunity to ask him questions tomorrow. With any luck, I may catch the Speaker's eye, as may the hon. Gentleman. I understand the view that Milosevic is not suffering and the ordinary Serbs are. How far sanctions can be relaxed without strengthening the regime must be the subject of on-going debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said that we should not demonise the Serbs. I could not agree more. We have no quarrel with the Serbs. We will be delighted when Serbia is no longer under the rule of Milosevic and his clique. However, my hon. Friend is not necessarily the best person to have made that remark because, during the conflict, he quoted in the House some German intelligence report condemning all ethnic Albanians—not only those in the KLA—without qualification.

If the remarks that my hon. Friend quoted had been made about blacks, Asians or Jews, what uproar there would have been in the House. What he said about ethnic

[Mr. Winnick]

Albanians being criminals—condemning a whole people without qualification—means that he is not the best person to lecture us about not demonising the Serbs.

Mr. Dalyell: I would not presume to lecture anybody on anything. On that occasion, I was quoting the exact words of the Bundeskriminalamt of the German police. It is they who used the words "ethnic Albanians". On reflection, I think that that was an unfortunate way of putting it, but the KLA, and a number of individuals, have been highly involved in the drugs trade, and what I said was an exact quotation from the German police.

Mr. Winnick: So what does that mean? If there were a similar report from somewhere or other about blacks, Asians or Jews, or if some African or Asian country produced such a report about whites, would we take those on board and simply quote them? At least my hon. Friend says that, on reflection, he feels that he might have qualified his words. The remark that he made was disgraceful—even more so as the ethnic Albanians were being subjected to atrocities at the time. My hon. Friend considered it appropriate to stand up in a free Parliament in a democratic country and quote that report in order to condemn a whole people. He should consider not only reflecting on what he said but apologising for it.

Mrs. Mahon: On the subject of drugs, NATO itself, through its parliamentary wing, said something that we shall take to our meeting in Amsterdam:

"Kosovo was an important centre of drug . . . trafficking"

linked to the KLA. It continued:

"The war disrupted these flows. However, there are clear signs that mafias are reorganising, both linked to the *organisation* of the drug traffic in south-eastern Europe (more than to the physical traffic itself), and to the infiltration of weapons into the province through the Albanian border."

That is making—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Lady must be brief in an intervention.

Mrs. Mahon *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the hon. Lady to make such a long intervention.

Mr. Winnick: It is all the same sort of anti-ethnic Albanian propaganda, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I condemn it, as I condemn anti-Serbian propaganda. Such things could be said about the United States, Turkey and many other countries. To condemn a whole people because of drug trafficking and other criminal activities is disgraceful, and illustrates the point that I made when I intervened earlier.

I have great respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax. What she said in reply to me was not very flattering but, be that as it may, we agree on 90 per cent. of domestic policies, and we shall probably agree again on Wednesday. None the less, she has allowed herself, as has the body that describes itself as the Committee for Peace in the Balkans, to act as a mouthpiece for Milosevic to a large extent.

Mr. Randall *rose—*

Mr. Winnick: I had hoped to finish my speech soon, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way to him.

We must bear in mind the necessity for helping people in Serbia, but I hope that we will also understand the background, and why the war that the international community undertook was entirely justified. I am proud of what we did, and in view of the horrors that were taking place in Kosovo, I would have been deeply ashamed if we had stood aside and said that what was happening was none of our business.

6.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has, with his usual diligence and persistence, raised a timely and important issue, in which he has had the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). In fairness, for the sake of balance on our Back Benches, I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is also present.

I shall try to answer all the questions that have been asked; I cannot plead lack of time tonight. However, if I cannot answer them all, I undertake to do as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow asked and write to him or to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax.

I assure both my hon. Friends that following the ending of the conflict, the whole international community—I emphasise the fact that this has happened in close partnership with the countries of the region—has moved forward quickly to address the need for reform and reconstruction in the Balkans. One of the most encouraging aspects of the events in Kosovo has been the affirmation by most countries in the region that they see their future as part of the democratic community of Europe. They are looking to a democratic, productive and prosperous future. Despite the fact that Milosevic is still there, he and all that he represents belong to the past—and that is where they should be consigned. Having worked together with our partners in the region so successfully to confront the forces of destruction—systematic murder and ethnic cleansing, as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North—the international community is now rightly putting our collective energy into the process of reconstruction. The United Kingdom is playing its full part in that.

It is because the subject of the debate is the reconstruction of Yugoslavia that I, rather than one of my colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, am responding to it. I shall say something about that process in relation to Yugoslavia; then, as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow requested, I shall also say a few words about it in relation to the region more generally. As he and others have said, there is a wider and more important context to the situation in Yugoslavia.

In Kosovo the immediate task following the ending of the conflict was to provide immediate support, in particular to the hundreds of thousands of refugees who

flooded back to the province. Was it not a welcome sight when they spontaneously flooded back to their homeland? The difficult task of both addressing immediate needs and longer-term reconstruction has been entrusted by the international community to the United Nations mission in Kosovo.

In all our discussions about reconstruction in Kosovo, we should bear in mind the fact that the people of the province and the international community are now addressing not only the impact of the conflict there this year, but the effects of many years of deliberate and systematic neglect of basic services by the Serbian authorities, particularly since 1992. I hope that my hon. Friends recognise that.

Inevitably, the task of taking over responsibility for executive and legislative authority for a population of 2 million people, in the circumstances in which UNMIK was assigned that duty, has had its difficulties. However, we should be clear that, whatever the organisational difficulties have been, we can all be proud of the international commitment and solidarity expressed through the UNMIK operation.

It has generally been recognised on both sides of the House and beyond that the United Kingdom has played a major role in the response to immediate humanitarian needs, as well as to preparation for longer-term reconstruction. We have committed £98 million for humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance since the beginning of the conflict in late March. We provided immediate and practical support to the establishment of the UNMIK organisation. I doubt whether it would have got off to such an effective start had it not been for that British support.

We have taken particular care to assist with the re-establishment of the health system in Kosovo, including support for a primary health care programme designed to reach 800,000 people, and the overhaul and management of core services at the centrally important Pristina university hospital. I do not know whether my hon. Friends saw that when they visited the country, but I hope that they will agree that the work has been effective.

We have also established an infrastructure engineering unit to try to ensure that essential repair work for water, sanitation and the power supply is carried out before the coming winter, which will soon be here. The unit is also involved in essential rehabilitation of public buildings. We are assisting with maintenance and repair at Pristina airport to enable it to remain open throughout the winter.

Of course, the future of the province should and will be led by its own people. We have funded a wide range of micro-projects enabling local communities to implement their own priorities in the reconstruction of services and facilities. That has included repairs to schools and community centres, arrangements for waste disposal and the direct provision of tools and equipment. The assistance has been channelled in part through KFOR brigades, which have made an outstanding contribution to the restoration of security and the development of local communities.

We have also helped to put in place some of the aspects of democratic society that were denied to the people of Kosovo by the Serbian authorities. For example, we have assisted with the development of independent media and the establishment of legal advice centres.

The European Union is also playing a major role in reconstruction, and we contribute significantly to that. It has so far pledged a total of 137 million euro in reconstruction aid in 1999, through the Obnova programme, in addition to 378 million euro of humanitarian aid. A reserve of up to 500 million euro for further reconstruction has been provided for in the EU budget.

The next step for the international community in addressing the requirement for reconstruction is the meeting to discuss Kosovo's reconstruction requirements that will take place in Brussels on 17 November. That is a crucial meeting in relation to long-term reconstruction.

Mr. Randall: When the Minister talks of reconstruction, does he regard Kosovo as part of Yugoslavia or as a separate entity, given the title of the debate?

Mr. Foulkes: I said that I would deal first with reconstruction in Kosovo and then move on. I have much to say and we have lots of time. I have nowhere else to go, although I do not know about the hon. Gentleman.

The assessment of need is being prepared jointly by the EU and the World Bank and that co-operation is vital. The meeting on 17 November will enable us to plan ahead in a co-ordinated way. We are also making arrangements to put in place our bilateral programme of support for reconstruction and development in Kosovo. Officials from my Department will be visiting Kosovo in early November for discussions on the possible content of a long-term programme of support. We shall assess the humanitarian assistance that we are presently giving, and maintaining it where necessary. Then we intend to manage a smooth transition from activities addressed to immediate needs to support for the process of transition to pluralist democracy and a prosperous market economy, as we are doing in other countries of the region where reformist policies are in place.

No one has raised the issue of Montenegro, but I should mention that we are also watching closely developments there. We have a small programme of bilateral activities there at present, and we have committed £650,000 of bilateral, humanitarian relief to Montenegro. The EU has pledged 13 million euro of new economic support for Montenegro. Britain took the lead in getting agreement in the EU for exemption of Montenegro from the current oil embargo and flight ban on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Mrs. Mahon: Is the money going into Montenegro and Macedonia a gift or a loan?

Mr. Foulkes: All the money that I have mentioned is in the form of grants. My Department is principally involved in granting money to our partner countries. We also strongly welcome the participation of Montenegro as a guest of the chair in meetings of the stability pact. It has been enormously encouraging to see the active participation of colleagues from Montenegro in the meetings of the stability pact, and their evident wish to associate themselves with the community of democratic European nations.

Mr. Dalyell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has said that there would be "severe

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consequences" if Serbia in any way tampers with Montenegrin autonomy. The west pretends to want to see former Yugoslavia held together, but not under the leadership of Milosevic. However, the west's every action, from economic sanctions to indictments for war crimes, entrenches Milosevic further. Are there any contingency plans being considered, even to the deploying of troops, to prevent Milosevic from entertaining any ideas of attacking Montenegro? I realise that that is a delicate matter.

Mr. Foulkes: It may be delicate, but it is also an issue for which I do not have direct responsibility. That question might be more appropriately addressed to one of my right hon. and hon. Friends. However, I do not disagree with the words of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary as quoted by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Before the Minister moves on to the issue of Serbia, can he tell us about the situation of the refugees who were displaced by the conflict into Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania? How many have been able to return to their homes and what assessment has been made of that situation, the need for reconstruction and the funds required?

Mr. Foulkes: I will return to the question of refugees later, but if I do not touch specifically on the point raised by the hon. Gentleman, I shall write to him.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not wish to try my hon. Friend's patience, but before he leaves the subject of Kosovo perhaps he can tell us whether it is true that the Irish Guards are the only people who do night patrol. If he cannot answer that question, perhaps he could find out and write to me.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is not trying my patience, because I have infinite patience and almost infinite time to deal with all these points. However, as he knows, I do not have direct responsibility for the Irish Guards, which is a matter for the Ministry of Defence. If he wishes to address that question to the Ministry, I am sure that he will get a sensible answer.

The challenge of reconstruction is, of course, greatest in Serbia. The British Government, and the international community, are as strongly committed to the transition of Serbia and the prosperity of its people as we are to other countries of the region with which we are working so closely and productively. We have nothing against the people of Serbia. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North said, we have no vendetta against the people of Serbia, many of whom have suffered under the leadership of Milosevic as much as anyone. It is the misfortune of the people of Serbia to be governed by a corrupt and undemocratic regime led by an indicted war criminal.

We are ready to give our support to the process of reform and reconstruction in Serbia as soon as there is a Government there who respect and implement the principles of democracy on which reform and reconstruction are based. As soon as Serbia is democratically governed and complies with its international obligations, it will immediately be able to participate in the stability pact and to benefit from bilateral and multilateral support available from the international community. The help that the people of Serbia need is ready to be provided if those conditions are met, but that is in the hands of the people of Serbia.

Mrs. Mahon: I raised earlier the double standard in the attitudes of the west, and the EU and the OSCE in particular, to Turkey, which has elected representatives in prison, an appalling human rights record and where up to 30,000 Kurds have been killed. What is my hon. Friend's response to the comparison of the attitudes to Turkey and Yugoslavia?

Mr. Foulkes: I do not think that it is helpful to make such comparisons. We could go around the world making comparisons, but we need to take each case on its merits. We need to make a judgment on the circumstances and all the information that we have. As my hon. Friend will know, I strongly opposed armed intervention in the Falklands, and that stance was not too popular at the time.

Mr. Winnick: I supported intervention.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend made a different judgment in the case of the Falklands, and rightly.

Several hon. Members—including the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), who is no longer in his place—raised the crucial issue of sanctions. The goal of the oil embargo, the flight bans and the visa regime is to promote democratic change in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, by as far as possible targeting Milosevic's regime.

On sanctions, I emphasise that, although it is crucial to keep up pressure on Milosevic and his regime, our argument is not with the Serbian people. Our present judgment is that the sanctions in force will not cause a humanitarian crisis in Serbia, although we are monitoring the situation closely. I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow that we remain ready to provide targeted humanitarian assistance, should it be required.

Forty thousand tonnes of oil have already been imported under the humanitarian exemptions provided in the terms of the western oil embargo. I say specifically to my hon. Friends that, if need be, further exemptions can be agreed within a week. Indeed, the oil embargo is incomplete. If Milosevic so chooses, he is free to purchase oil from Russia, Bulgaria and the Ukraine, so the opportunity to bring help to his people is in his own hands.

Mr. David Heath: I am very interested in what the Minister is saying. Am I right in thinking that, as I heard a couple of weeks ago, it is the assessment of the United Nations Commission for Europe—a body in which I do not always have a great deal of confidence—that there is a need for a change in that sanctions regime, precisely to replace the generating capacity that was destroyed during the war and avoid difficulties of a humanitarian nature this winter?

Mr. Foulkes: Is the hon. Gentleman referring to the Balkans Task Force?

Mr. Heath: No; the UN Commission for Europe.

Mr. Foulkes: I believe that the same point was dealt with by that report. However, if the close monitoring that is

taking place shows that further exemptions are needed, they can be agreed rapidly—within a week. We shall take that into account. The reports that we receive—I am not immediately aware of the one that the hon. Gentleman mentions—certainly help us to make up our mind about that.

On refugees in Serbia—a subject raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow—the precise figures are unknown. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has permission from the Serb authorities for a re-registration exercise to reassess the numbers. The current estimate is about 700,000. The UN office for co-ordinating humanitarian affairs, based in Belgrade, says that collective centres in Serbia are receiving energy supplies, including from non-governmental organisations and the Red Cross; and UNICEF, the Red Cross, the European Community Humanitarian Office and Focus—a Swiss, Russian and Czech agency—have support programmes focused on schools and hospitals. Natural gas imports into Serbia from Russia via Hungary are continuing. That assistance is available to help to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of people in Serbia.

Audrey Wise (Preston): Would my hon. Friend care to quantify the help that he just mentioned?

Mr. Foulkes: Not immediately, but I could reply in more detail to my hon. Friend in relation to that. I do not believe that she was in the Chamber when the question to which I am replying was asked, in an intervention. If I had been given greater notice, I would have tried to reply to that point in more detail, but I shall try to do so later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow expressed particular interest in the environmental impact of the Kosovo conflict, as he has done several times in the House. As he said, the joint United Nations Environment Programme-United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Balkans task force—under the chairmanship of Dr. Haavisto, an eminent Finn—was set up in May to investigate the impact of the conflict on the environment in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and on human settlements. That task force looked in particular at the environmental consequences of air strikes for industrial sites; the impact of the conflict on the Danube; the impact on biodiversity; the consequences for human settlements and the environment; and the use of depleted uranium weapons.

It is a testimony to our concern about the issue that that task force was set up and was given that remit. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said that he was concerned that the conflict may have resulted in an environmental catastrophe. The BTF's key conclusions were that the Kosovo conflict had not caused an environmental catastrophe in the Balkans region, but that pollution at some sites was serious and did, indeed, pose a threat to human health.

Environmental contamination as a result of the conflict was identified at four hot-spot sites. However, the BTF also said that part of the contamination identified at some sites was obviously due to poor environmental management pre-dating the Kosovo conflict; that, in particular, there was a long-term deficiency in the treatment and storage of hazardous waste; and that immediate attention to environmental issues was necessary, regardless of the cause. Concern about that pre-existing long-term deficiency had previously been expressed by some other states in the region.

Mr. Dalyell: I quote Dr. Haavisto:

"It is up to the international community to discuss and decide whether the rules of modern warfare are up to date when looking at all the risks to human health and to the environment".

Do the Government in general accept Dr. Haavisto's request in that respect?

Mr. Foulkes: Obviously, the environmental considerations must be taken into account, with a range of other things, but as I said, Dr. Haavisto's—and the task force's—principal conclusion was not that the conflict had caused an environmental catastrophe.

Inevitably, especially where industrial sites are targeted in the course of conflicts, there is likely to be environmental impact. However, it is relevant to bear in mind the fact that, in all aspects of public administration and service delivery, Kosovo has suffered from extensive and deliberate neglect by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, especially since 1992. That point is made in the BTF report.

There has also been particular concern about the possibility of pollution of the Danube, including contamination of drinking water and the ingestion of toxins by fish. The BTF concluded that there was no evidence of an ecological catastrophe for the Danube as a result of air strikes, although there were some serious hot spots where contamination by air strikes had occurred. That was against the background of long-term chronic pollution.

Mr. Dalyell: I quote page 53 of the report by Professor Stephan and Dr. Strobel:

"It is of urgent necessity to analyse sediments and bank filtrates in case they are to be used in the production of drinking water. As fishing is practised in the Danube and in the canals, the fish should regularly be checked for mercury and PCB content so that diseases (e. g. Minimata disease . . .) can be prevented."

Is action being taken on that?

Mr. Foulkes: We are certainly taking account of that; that is why Dr. Haavisto's task force was set up. However, I wish that my hon. Friend would also take account of the point that I was making when he was preparing to make that intervention—that many of the problems pre-date the conflict and are caused by poor environmental management before it.

I shall also answer my hon. Friend's previous question, in relation to the blocking of the Danube as a result of the bombing of bridges during the conflict. On 11 October, the General Affairs Council of the European Union emphasised the EU's readiness to support the Danube Commission and the countries of the region in addressing that issue, given the importance of the Danube to regional economies. We know how important that river is. I have sailed down it myself; I know how crucial it is to regional economies. However, the Serbian authorities are refusing to clear the debris until the cost is paid by the NATO countries.

Mr. Dalyell: Exactly.

Mr. Foulkes: Let me finish. However, the true motives of the Serbian authorities are revealed by the fact that they have declined offers from Russia and from the city of Dortmund to help with bridge building and the clearance of the river. If they were genuinely concerned about the

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immediate effects, including the effect of icing up, why have they not accepted the offers from Russia and from Dortmund to do that clearing up?

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax raised the question of the Kosovo protection force. That force explicitly preserves 10 per cent. of its places for non-Albanian minorities. Not all of them have been taken up, but that allocation is fundamental to the concept of the force.

The Kosovo protection force is not a military organisation. KFOR has reported that the KLA was successfully demilitarised. We should give some credit to positive steps of that kind.

Mrs. Mahon: How does my hon. Friend explain the shootings and the continued ethnic cleansing? How does he explain the fact that the bishop and the priest to whom I referred earlier have pulled out? The Kosovo protection force is the KLA by another name.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend puts two and two together and makes five. She cannot attribute everything that she has described to the Kosovo protection force—unless she has some information to which we are not privy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow raised the matter of our obligations to Bulgaria and Romania. We are working closely with those countries. I visited Bulgaria recently and discussed our programme there, and I hope to visit Romania. We are producing strategies with both those countries, and copies are available in the Library. We have very good relationships with Bulgaria and Romania, and both are taking part in the stability pact meetings. It is important for all hon. Members to remember that, as I said earlier, those countries in the region supported the NATO operation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow also asked about chemical factories. The task force looked into that matter, and concluded that, although there were no catastrophic effects as a result of the operation, there was evidence of a background of chronic problems owing to long-term environmental mismanagement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow also raised the matter of the rebuilding of the motor industry. As I said earlier, we understand that need, but there can be no reconstruction activity until a democratic Government is in place. That democratic Government must comply with the international standards, including the ICTY in the Hague.

Mr. Randall: Would the Minister consider the Government of Croatia to be democratic? Would sanctions be lifted if there were a Government in Serbia similar to the one in Croatia?

Mr. Foulkes: It is important to stick to the topic in hand. Various hon. Members have tried to make a range of comparisons: following them up would have taken us all around the world. All I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that it is important to stick by our principles, and the principles that I have enunciated apply universally.

Mr. Dalyell: It is easy to be optimistic about Pancevo, but the report on mercury that I quoted earlier states:

"The bombings in Pancevo and the destruction of the PVC manufacturing plant also caused the release of mercury. Part of the mercury may have evaporated due to the heat, part of it may have been transformed into mercury compounds through the simultaneous presence of heat and chlorine and through the combustion products of the rocket fuels, and may have migrated in the smoke cloud in the form of fumes, dust, or soot. Some of the mercury must also have been washed into the Pancevo canal by the water used for fire extinguishing. Mercury findings in the soil and the concentrations at lower levels confirm this.

Mercury vapour and fog"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows better than that: his intervention is far too long.

Mr. Foulkes: With respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow, it seems to me that as soon as I answer systematically and point by point one of the matters that he has raised in his opening speech and in interventions, he raises something entirely new. Given that this Adjournment debate could go on until 10.30 pm, my hon. Friend could have spoken at much greater length in his initial presentation. I should then have had the opportunity to consider such matters carefully and to reply to them—just as I am trying to reply to the various points that have been raised. Again with respect, to intervene constantly with totally new points just because I have managed to answer an earlier question is not a proper way for my hon. Friend to conduct the debate.

I now turn to another point, raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Linlithgow and for Walsall, North—the murder of the UN official. I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow that his information is absolutely correct. I join him, and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North, in deploring that murder. I strongly praise the work being done by the United Nations. I hope that we are agreed on that matter at least.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax raised the question of casualties incurred during the course of the NATO operation. I do not quarrel with what she said, but she should also bear in mind the fact that, in the year preceding the NATO operations, 2,000 Kosovans were killed, 400,000 were internally displaced and 90,000 were displaced outside Kosovo. In addition, a quarter of all EU asylum applications in 1998 were from Kosovo Albanians. Those figures come from the UNHCR; they testify to what was happening, and demonstrate why we had to take the action that we took.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax also asked about the report stating that Serbs had been attacked by Albanians. I can tell her that a column of Serbians was escorted by KFOR troops, and that a small group of Serbians was also tacked on behind. Somewhere, that smaller group took a wrong turn and ended up in a Kosovo Albanian village. They were set upon by the villagers, who thought that they were trying to return to Pec. The Serbs were eventually rescued by Italian troops—doing the job that they are there to do—and have now reached Montenegro. There were no casualties, and the main group under the KFOR escort also arrived safely.

Mrs. Mahon: I am sure that we are all pleased about that outcome. In September, KFOR stated that nearly 400 Serbs and members of other minorities had been killed, and that 500 had been abducted and were still missing. Will my hon. Friend comment on those figures?

Mr. Foulkes: I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North said—that we deplore any

killing or torture of Serbs, or any attacks on them, just as we would deplore any killing, torture or attack suffered by Kosovans. Our attitude to such matters does not discriminate according to nationality.

I share the concern expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for Halifax and for Walsall, North, but I am sure that they will welcome the fact that there are now encouraging signs that the people of Serbia recognise the destructive nature of the current regime. For example, we welcome the meeting of Serbian mayors that took place on 7 October in Szeged in Hungary. That was a clear demonstration that democratic principles are alive in Serbia, despite the malevolent attitudes of the Milosevic government. Those principles need to be encouraged.

The European Union's General Affairs Council, at its meeting on 11 October, made clear the position of the European Union concerning Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The council declared that, as soon as the Governments of Serbia and the FRY are under the political control of democratic forces and there is full co-operation with the international criminal tribunal of the former Yugoslavia, the EU and its member states will lift sanctions and launch an EU reconstruction programme. That is a positive incentive for all the people of Serbia.

The meeting of those conditions would also enable the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to negotiate a stabilisation and association agreement with the EU, in line with the other western Balkan countries. The FRY would also be able to join the stability pact and negotiate the conditions necessary to join the Council of Europe. Britain is ready to play an active role, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in reconstruction and reform in Serbia and the FRY, as soon as political conditions in Serbia allow.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise that our commitment, and that of the international community, to reconstruction is a commitment to the region as a whole. The European Union has announced its intention to negotiate stabilisation and association agreements to assist with the acceleration of economic growth in countries of the region. We want them to be democratic and prosperous. Negotiations are under way with some countries. The international community has also expressed its commitment to reform throughout the region through the creation of the stability pact, which was established by Heads of Government, including the Prime Minister, at Sarajevo on 30 July.

The stability pact has moved on quickly. First meetings have been held of its three working tables on economic reconstruction, security, and democratisation and human rights. Each working table has agreed a programme of work to be carried out before its next meetings, early next year.

The most encouraging aspect of the stability pact, and its essential strength, is that it is not a donor consortium but a partnership between the countries of the region and the international community. It is enormously encouraging to have seen the part that the countries of the region have played in stability pact discussions. Indeed, the next meetings of the working tables will be hosted by countries in the region—Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Hungary. The meetings of the stability pact have agreed and emphasised that participation is open to Serbia as soon as it meets the necessary conditions.

The United Kingdom has been a strong supporter of the stability pact as a means of accelerating the path to pluralist democracy and flourishing market economies in the region. We have, jointly with the United States, presented a compact for reform, investment, integrity and growth. The compact sets out the mix of conditions required in the countries of the region to promote investment and growth of the private sector as the basis for the creation of wealth and prosperity. We are now actively involved in developing a plan of action to take forward the compact and to assist the countries of the region in implementing it.

We have also taken the lead of a task group established to consider the promotion of the principles of free and independent media throughout the region. Discussion is taking place on draft principles prepared by Britain.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow secured this debate. It is, of course, his right to pursue this again and again, diligently and persistently. This is a democratic country—I wonder whether he would have the same kind of freedoms in Serbia.

I went to Poland last week and visited the concentration camps around Lublin. Some people would now have us believe that no genocide took place there either. I saw the evidence of genocide. Similarly, we know of the evidence of genocide in Kosovo.

It always surprises me that some of my hon. Friends believe the propaganda of the dictator Milosevic rather than believing me and my ministerial colleagues. Milosevic is the villain of the piece. He has systematically attacked the people of Kosovo and is responsible for the continuing suffering of his own people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow attacked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development earlier in the debate. My right hon. Friend and I have worked for years—and will continue to do so—to help the poorest of the world's poor. We would not unnecessarily do anything to hurt the poor people of Serbia. That is why I hope that the points that I have made on behalf of Her Majesty's Government will strike a resonance on both sides of the House.

7.26 pm

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the sitting until a Message was received from the Lords relating to the Greater London Authority Bill, pursuant to Order [29 October.]*

It being Ten o'clock, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.

MESSAGE FROM THE LORDS

A Message was brought from the Lords, as follows:

The Lords have agreed to the Greater London Authority Bill, with amendments, to which they desire the concurrence of this House.

Lords amendments to the Greater London Authority Bill to be considered tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 158].

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved,

That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McAvoy.]*

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 2 November 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL (*By Order*)
Order for further consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Tuesday 9 November.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Drugs

1. **Mr. Frank Roy** (Motherwell and Wishaw): If he will make a statement about his Department's actions this year to combat the drugs trade. [95030]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. John Battle): This year, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has continued to co-ordinate the international elements of the United Kingdom's national drugs strategy. With other Departments, our efforts are primarily targeted at reducing the production and trafficking of class A drugs to the UK, and at increasing the effectiveness of other countries' anti-drugs efforts.

Mr. Roy: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for that reply, and welcome him to his position; I wish him well with his new portfolio.

I note my hon. Friend's comments on the production and trafficking of drugs. There is a perception that bravado and glamour are associated with foreign drug barons. Can my hon. Friend assure me that everything will be done by the Foreign Office to deal with those drug barons? The perception of glamour and bravado associated with them manifests itself in the form of murder, beatings, violence, intimidation, fear and real terrorism on the streets of my constituency—indeed, throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Battle: I thank my hon. Friend for the way in which he has raised this matter. It is now one that none of us, as constituency Members of Parliament, can ignore. In the Foreign Office, for our part, we have already contributed about £5.9 million this year to anti-drugs measures that support practical international projects to tackle the problem in the transit countries and to break off the supply lines of heroin and cocaine. Yes it is important, as my hon. Friend suggests, that we tackle the source and supply of drugs, but we must also address the money laundering that rides on the back of that.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Is the Minister aware of the astonishing growth in the drugs trans-shipment trade through the Caribbean? It was recently estimated that the amount of drugs being trafficked through the West Indian islands and Guyana is equivalent to the gross domestic product of all the English-speaking territories in the Caribbean—the implication being that that hugely undermines good governance in those countries. Will the Minister tell us why he is withdrawing British technical officials from the police forces and Customs services of the dependent territories, thus not supporting the islands sufficiently to enable them to retain their alternative employment based on bananas?

Mr. Battle: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a great interest in development matters and is holding conversations about the budget of the Department for International Development, to which the special projects refer. I can only say that, as far as I am aware, within the budget of the Foreign Office there are collaborative, co-operative projects—especially in the transit countries and in countries such as Colombia—to tackle the problems and to work with the local authorities and security services to do what we can.

The hon. Gentleman might be encouraged and interested to learn that the seizure figures in Britain are increasing massively. In 1996, 740 kg of heroin were seized; in 1998, the amount was 990 kg. In 1996, 1,150 kg of cocaine were seized; in 1998, 2,800 kg. I shall hold further conversations with my colleagues in the Department for International Development about the points raised by the hon. Gentleman, but I emphasise the fact that the Government take the matter extremely seriously. We shall work to break off the supplies and, where practical, we shall look into alternative production.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North–East): My hon. Friend will be aware that, last week, one of my constituents was released from prison in Goa on a drugs charge of which he was not guilty. I thank the Foreign Office for the support that was given. However, although we are rightly keeping up a drive against the supply of drugs, can we continue to give support to our citizens abroad when they are wrongly charged in such incidents?

Mr. Battle: Again, basic justice is precisely the point for the staff of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office abroad; they offer support and consider the justice of particular cases. There will be occasions when people are wrongly charged.

I am also encouraged by a case that is before the court in my own constituency of Leeds. Drugs—120 kg of cocaine—were allegedly brought out of Colombia. They were picked up in a Land Rover; people were charged and are currently on trial. That results from the kind of international co-operation that we want in the future.

Pakistan

2. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip–Northwood): If he will make a statement on British relations with Pakistan. [95031]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): Britain is a friend of Pakistan, with which we have many historic, family and commercial ties. We have followed with concern events in Pakistan over the past year, and are dismayed by last month's military coup. We will work closely with our colleagues in the Commonwealth to press for an early and credible timetable for the restoration of democracy to the people of Pakistan. It is important also to many of our other friends around the world that the international community does not provide any signal that it is willing to condone the military overthrow of a constitutional Government.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is it not true that the right hon. Gentleman's claim to be a friend of Pakistan will ring hollow because he has rushed to judgment without a full appreciation of the circumstances? Will he please bear in mind the interests of the people of Pakistan? Is it not a fact that the impoverishment of Pakistan has been at the heart of that country's political problems? Will not Pakistan be further impoverished by the arbitrary cut-off of British development aid? If Pakistan were suspended from the Commonwealth, as Her Majesty' Government seem to want, how would that improve relations with India? How will it affect the situation of Pakistanis in this country, who owe their ability to vote in elections and to join the civil service, the armed forces or the police to their Commonwealth nationality?

Mr. Cook: The decision that has been taken is not to suspend Pakistan's membership of the Commonwealth, but to suspend it from the councils of the Commonwealth. The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the final point I made. Far from our being alone on the issue, the attitude of most other Commonwealth countries was far more vigorous than ours precisely because they do not want to give the signal—which the hon. Gentleman is in danger of providing—that military coups are acceptable in certain circumstances.

On Saturday, I saw Mr. Axworthy, the leader of the Commonwealth mission to Pakistan, who had returned with a recommendation that Pakistan should be monitored closely by the Commonwealth to determine whether there has been a return to democracy; further decisions will flow from that. In the meantime, we shall maintain dialogue with Pakistan and maintain pressure on the Government of Pakistan to restore the democracy that they have taken away. However, we cannot continue business as usual as though nothing in Pakistan had changed.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is considerable support among Pakistanis for the change in Pakistan and that that feeling is the result of the failure of Pakistan's elected Governments to provide transparent and good governance? Does he also agree that the imposition of sanctions, the withdrawal of aid and the isolation of Pakistan will not help to restore democracy in Pakistan, but will ensure that people who already face misery will have to endure greater hardship?

Mr. Cook: Of course it is the case that politicians in Pakistan have badly let down the people who elected them. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that I have the support of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

It is true that many members of the Pakistani community have welcomed the disappearance of the Sharif regime. We are calling not for the restoration of the Sharif regime but for the restoration of democracy so that the people of Pakistan, not Pakistan's military, decide who is to rule them. Although it might be true that some of the elected politicians of Pakistan have not provided the democracy, prosperity and accountability that was wanted, the record of military regimes in Pakistan is, on the whole, even worse.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid–Bedfordshire): The Foreign Secretary will be aware that the Sharif Government removed the President of Pakistan, deposed the chief justice and kicked out the army chief; and Sharif then appointed cronies to be judges and provincial governors and to other positions of power—he even had his thugs storm the Supreme Court to prevent it from hearing corruption charges against him. Why did the Foreign Secretary take an immediate decision to remove from the Musharraf regime support that he had provided to Prime Minister Sharif's corrupt and dishonest regime?

Mr. Cook: The principle at stake is that it is for the people of Pakistan to make up their own mind, and the place to do that is at the ballot box. There will be many friends of Britain throughout Africa and Asia who are dismayed to learn that the modern Tory party endorses a military coup.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, although none of us condones or approves of the way in which the government of Pakistan was changed, it is essential that we help the people of Pakistan to achieve a democratic Government, free from the corruption and intolerance that characterised their previous Government? We must not penalise the people of Pakistan, but positively support their efforts to achieve the democracy that I know my right hon. Friend wants.

Mr. Cook: I assure my hon. Friend that we are maintaining humanitarian aid, which can be channelled through non-governmental organisations, and that much of our aid to Pakistan falls into that category. We cannot do business as normal with a military regime, but we are certainly willing to work with its leaders to restore democracy. The Commonwealth mission made it clear that help would be available, and the regime's leaders will be judged on whether they take advantage of the assistance, guidance and funding that will be provided to help to restore democracy.

Jordan

3. **Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): If he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the supply of arms to Jordan. [95032]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Peter Hain): We have a close and positive relationship with Jordan and admire the way in which King Abdullah has conducted the first months of his reign. Britain has long been a traditional supplier of arms and military training to the Jordanian armed forces.

Mr. Bruce: The Minister will know that the tank refurbishment facility in my constituency is currently refurbishing Challenger tanks, which were probably built in Leeds, for sale to Jordan. I do not object to that, but what assurances has he received that those tanks will not be passed to Iraq? We know that British armaments were passed to Iraq via Jordan during the Iraqi war.

Mr. Hain: Up to 288 Challenger tanks have been offered to the Jordanians, who have long been allies and a force for stability and moderation in the region. Some 14 of the tanks have been handed over by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence who is in the region at the moment. We are absolutely certain that the tanks will not be passed to the Iraqi regime—although such things occurred under the previous Conservative Government.

Middle East

4. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement on the current state of the middle east peace process. [95033]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I visited both Israel and the Palestinian Authority last week. I was encouraged by the evidence of progress in implementing the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement, such as the opening of the southern safe passage from Gaza to the west bank on which I travelled during my visit. Many serious issues remain to be resolved if both parties are to fulfil the ambitious timetable of concluding final status talks within a year, but I was impressed that this time the Israeli leadership as well as the Palestinian Authority want to make a success of the peace process.

I am pleased to report to the House that, while in Israel, I opened an educational centre named in memory of our late colleague, Derek Fatchett. All parts of the House will appreciate the warmth and affection with which he is remembered for his work to encourage both sides to come together.

Mr. Grogan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Following the sixth anniversary of the signing of the Oslo agreement and my right hon. Friend's successful visit to Israel last week, does he agree that if the final status talks falter in the run-up to next September's deadline, Britain is uniquely placed to act as an honest broker in those talks? In the words of *The Times* editorial of last week, London could be a very effective back channel for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Mr. Cook: Both parties whom I met in the middle east recognise that Britain is a friend of the peace process and a natural voice of the peace process within the wider European Union. Both parties are anxious that the peace process should be paralleled with opening trade links with the European Union in order to secure a real economic peace dividend for the citizens of the Palestinian Authority.

We will do anything we can to assist in taking the dialogue forward. We are particularly keen to ensure that there is communication with Syria so that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks can also continue. However, I remind the House that back channels are best kept secret if they are to work.

Sir David Madel (South–West Bedfordshire): Is it the Government's view that a successful outcome of the middle east peace process will be the creation of an independent Palestinian state?

Mr. Cook: Along with our partners in the European Union, we stand ready to consider recognising a Palestinian state. As the hon. Gentleman may be aware, the Berlin declaration made clear the Palestinian people's right to an independent state. The picture painted by both sides of the likely outcome could be recognised only as creating a Palestinian state. We will certainly ensure that the Palestinian Authority has the necessary institutions and is ready to take over and run any such entity.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Following his successful visit, can my right hon. Friend assure the House that, on a day when the parties are again assembling in Oslo, the plight of the Palestinian refugees who are based mainly in Lebanon will not be forgotten? Will my right hon. Friend and his colleagues do what they can to ensure that, while we do not seek a long agenda for the final status negotiations, we do not forget the role and the plight of the Palestinian refugees?

Mr. Cook: I visited one of the camps of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency while I was in Gaza. I was moved by the conditions in the camp and by the enormously strong spirit of the children and their hopes for the future. UNRWA particularly appreciates the fact that Britain has accelerated its donations this year in order to avert the financial crisis that it would otherwise have faced. My hon. Friend is right to say that the position of the refugees must be included in any final status agreement, and particular attention should be given to refugees in Lebanon who have suffered most from being the least integrated into the local economy.

EU Reform

5. **Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): What discussions he has held with the President of the European Commission on proposals for reforms to EU institutions and decision–making procedures. [95034]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I regularly discuss institutional reform with colleagues both in the Commission and in other member states. In all these discussions, Britain has argued that the forthcoming intergovernmental conference should be focused on the issues that must be resolved before the next enlargement can take place. Britain has a clear national interest in securing a shift in the weighting of votes in the Council of Ministers more fairly to represent population.

I called recently on Vice-President Kinnock to congratulate him on the progress that he has been making in reforming the Commission, including a code of conduct for Commissioners and the abolition of national quotas for senior Commission staff. His reforms will produce a more efficient and more accountable Commission and will no doubt be welcomed by the right hon. Gentleman and all other Members who wish the European Union to be a success.

Mr. Forth: With which of the recent pronouncements by the President of the Commission on institutional and decision-making reform does the Foreign Secretary disagree?

Mr. Cook: It is perfectly clear that in the intergovernmental conference, the framing of the treaty and the framework of the discussions will be run by member states. Before every IGC there is a proposal by the President of the Commission, but it does not shape what comes afterwards. I look forward with interest to what Commissioner Prodi has to say, but that will not deflect me from pursuing the British national interest.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is it not clear that institutions devised more than 50 years ago for a small group of six countries are not working today for 15 countries and that they will certainly not work when, as we hope, the European Union is enlarged to 20? They would result only in gridlock or immobilism, which is what the enemies of Europe want. Can my right hon. Friend say, in response to the new expert report, whether he agrees that institutional reform should be a comprehensive process—not the two-stage process envisaged in the Amsterdam protocol—and that it is urgent? I hope that it can be completed by the end of the French presidency next year.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend refers to the enlargement of the European Union. Of course, that enlargement will pose questions for the shape of institutions, but, at the same time, it is important that we secure it. That is why we wish to see the forthcoming IGC focus narrowly on those issues that it is necessary to resolve so that enlargement can proceed. Those issues were set out at Amsterdam where it was made quite clear that enlargement cannot happen without those reforms. That is why it is so odd that the Conservative party has apparently pledged itself to vetoing the IGC if it does not get its way. That would make Tory foreign policy as unpopular in central and eastern Europe as it already is in western Europe.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford–on–Avon): The Foreign Secretary knows that there are proposals in many quarters for serious and major extensions to qualified majority voting as part of the institutional reform needed for enlargement of the union. Can he confirm that the Government are committed to maintaining our national veto in matters of defence, tax and border controls?

Mr. Cook: Yes.

Mr. Maples: That is what I hoped the right hon. Gentleman would say. Can he then confirm that, if the enlargement treaty that results from next year's intergovernmental conference contains provisions for qualified majority voting in any of those areas, the Government will not sign it?

Mr. Cook: We do not anticipate for one minute that we will be confronted with that. Very few other countries would support the proposal that the hon. Gentleman has put to me. On this, we are with the great mainstream in the European Union.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): You are dodging the question.

Mr. Cook: I am not dodging the question. I do not expect to come back to the House and report that we have accepted a treaty that contains those provisions, and I do not expect that other members in Europe will ask us to do so.

Mr. Forth: You are wriggling.

Mr. Cook: I am not wriggling at all. I have made it quite plain what our position is and what I expect the outcome of the treaty to be.

However, the hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon (Mr. Maples) should consider whether he can name one other nation in Europe that supports his policy of a pick and mix Europe. He needs unanimity to get such a policy through, and he cannot find even one supporter. His policy will plainly produce a crisis in Europe. It is no wonder that, since he produced the policy, the majority of the electorate have said that they are even less likely to vote Tory than they were before.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, if there were no changes whatever to decision making in the European Union, for which the Conservative party appears to argue, enlargement would not take place? If that is the Conservatives' policy, they ought to front up and be honest about such an outcome. Does he also agree that if we adopted the Conservative party's pick and mix approach to which EU decisions we were prepared to agree to, we would never get the beef ban lifted?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the beef ban would not have been lifted if the decision had been based on a veto. Indeed, one reason why we did not achieve the reforms to the agricultural policy that we sought is that the Agriculture Council proceeds on qualified majority voting, and the European summit on unanimity. My hon. Friend is right to say that there will have to be significant changes to procedures and decision making in the EU, but I give the House a guarantee that

we will never agree to anything like the wide raft of expansion of QMV to which the Conservatives agreed when they were in government.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North–East Fife): When considering the case for reform, will the Foreign Secretary have regard to the need to ensure the effectiveness of both the Commission and the European Court, without which the prospect of British beef being exported to France and Germany would be extremely remote? Does he for a moment consider that, in this instance, it is a matter of great regret that neither the Commission nor the Court has any jurisdiction over the United States and Canada?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. and learned Gentleman points up the plainly true lesson that we must learn from the dispute: because we are members of the EU we have remedies, which are being put into practice even now. We do not have such remedies in other states around the world, which is why we have not been able to shift America from its beef ban since 1989. The tale demonstrates the case for being inside Europe and how Britain would be damaged by the Opposition's policy of endangering Britain's membership of the EU. We are better leading in Europe than leaving Europe.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the need for change to the institutional structure in order to allow enlargement must be recognised not only by existing European Union member states and all parties of any significance in them, but by all countries that want to join? Therefore, should not people who purport to support enlargement recognise that such institutional change must be brought about?

Mr. Cook: If my hon. Friend is referring to the Opposition's purported support of enlargement, such support sits oddly with their commitment to veto an IGC that is necessary for enlargement. He is correct to say that countries that are seeking to join the EU want to join one that is efficient and forward looking and that gives them the same opportunity of open markets that we enjoy. They would view with incomprehension the Euro-sceptics in Britain who want to get off the bus at the very time that they are trying to join it.

Yugoslavia

7. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): If he will make a statement on sanctions applying to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. [95036]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): The European Union and the United Nations maintain a broad range of sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. They were mostly imposed in response to the atrocities carried out in Kosovo by the federal republic authorities, and remain in place as part of the international effort to promote democratic reform in the federal republic.

Mr. Randall: Would a Yugoslav Government, whose democracy was based on the Chinese model, be deemed acceptable for the lifting of sanctions?

Mr. Vaz: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the purpose of sanctions is to ensure that we promote democratic change in the federal republic. They are tough measures that are designed to make it clear to the authorities that we are against their proposals. On the question of China, one must consider such matters case by case.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Does my hon. Friend agree that Serbia holds the key to peace and democracy not just in Kosovo but in the whole Balkan region? Will he assure me that the Government will do all in their power to ensure that Serbia changes its ways, joins us, adopts western values and becomes a democracy?

Mr. Vaz: It is the Government's wish that the countries of the Balkans should join the European mainstream, but we can never have peace and stability in the Balkans with the likes of Milosevic in control of Serbia. That is why we have a targeted sanctions approach. That is why organisations, including the European Union and the United Nations, are working together to ensure that there is democracy, peace and stability in the local area.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): But does the Minister agree that a Balkan winter is as cold for Serbs as it is for Kosovan Albanians? If there is a shortage of fuel for heating in Serbia this winter because generating capacity was hit by the Balkan conflict, will he take steps to amend the sanctions regime to ensure that that does not happen?

Mr. Vaz: The Government are working with the European Union to ensure that as much humanitarian aid as possible is provided. That is why the European Commission has put aside 50 million euro for humanitarian purposes, and that is why organisations such as Energy for Democracy are working to ensure that heating is supplied to local people.

Palestinian Authority

8. **Mr. Jim Murphy** (Eastwood): If he will make a statement on the British Government's support for economic development in the Palestinian Authority area. [95038]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Peter Hain: We are providing £50 million in bilateral aid over the next three years, including £24 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. We have also established the Derek Fatchett memorial fund to finance studies by Palestinian students. In view of the high esteem in which Derek Fatchett was held across the House, I am sure that that will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Murphy: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he join me in welcoming this month's Labour Friends of Israel-inspired summit, involving Palestinian and Israeli trade unionists, held here in the United Kingdom, to foster a sense of trust and allow them to discuss how best to bring inward investment into that region? What more can the UK Government and the European Union do to ensure that such initiatives become

much more widespread, and deliver peace and security for the people of Israel, and peace and a new prosperity for the people of the Palestinian Authority?

Mr. Hain: I very much welcome that initiative, which is being hosted by the Trades Union Congress. That is exactly the type of initiative that promotes partnership and progress, and increases respect between Palestinians and Israelis. In future, Israel and the new Palestine will need to live together in peace and stability. We hope that there will be further such initiatives—possibly supported, as they could be, by the $400 million of European aid that is due to be provided to the area during the next four years.

Departmental Recruitment

9. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What measures he is taking to open up recruitment to his Department to people from a wider social background. [95039]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Peter Hain): Our policies aim to draw on the very best of Britain's diverse society by recruiting on merit more people from ethnic minorities and more with disabilities, and to increase the number of women at senior levels in the Foreign Office.

Helen Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and welcome him to his new post.

I appreciate the amount of work that has been done to encourage people from a wider range of backgrounds to consider careers in the Foreign Office, but will he consider extending the work that has been done, especially with young people, to target careers teaching in inner-city schools and in schools in the centre of constituencies such as mine, where there is no tradition of considering such careers but where there is a vast pool of underused talent? Perhaps he will tell me how long it might be before I hear a few Warrington accents in the Foreign Office.

Mr. Hain: I think there might be at least one such accent in the Foreign Office at present, but I welcome the points made by my hon. Friend. We are determined, as a Government, to open up the Foreign Office to as broad a section of society as possible, so that people join the Foreign Office on merit and are given every opportunity to do so. As a result of these initiatives, more and more women are being promoted to senior positions in the Foreign Office, which is encouraging. The open days that have been held—one took place last week—have brought into the Foreign Office some 3,000 young people who could possibly be recruited in future.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Is the Minister aware that Conservative Members believe that recruiting on merit more women, people from the ethnic minorities and those with disabilities to the Foreign Office is a thoroughly worthwhile cause, even though the Foreign Secretary's pursuit of it has been characteristically inept? If the hon. Gentleman accepts the good faith of Conservative Members, will he go further and agree that, in addition to recruiting a great many others, the Foreign Office should be keen to recruit as many as possible of the outstanding products of the magnificent remaining grammar schools, which are the beacons of excellence in our society today?

Mr. Hain: As I am in a charitable mood, I shall accept the good faith of Opposition Members. We are determined to recruit on merit. We want people from all class and ethnic backgrounds, from right across the country and with all sorts of accents, to come and join the Foreign Office to represent Britain at home and abroad.

Kenya

10. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): What assessment he has made of recent changes in the Kenya Administration in relation to democracy building. [95040]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Peter Hain): In my meetings with him on 13 October in Nairobi and in London on 29 October, President Moi made it clear that he was leading Kenya's new economic recovery strategy to root out corruption and inefficiency and to extend democracy. We support that and want it implemented quickly and in full.

Mr. Chapman: During a recess visit to Kenya under the excellent leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), I found a country beset with internal problems—problems of poverty, infrastructure breakdown and crime—many of them caused by a lack of probity in Government or economic mismanagement. Does my hon. Friend believe that the appointment of a few technocrats, no matter how distinguished they are, to senior official positions is sufficient to tackle the problems, or is it merely tinkering and placing excessively high expectations on those individuals?

Mr. Hain: I, too, was grateful for the briefing given to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) following the visit. I understand the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) that this may be another false start in Kenya, as there have been a number of false starts. However, there is no doubt that the economic recovery strategy, including a determination to root out corruption and to reform the parastatals and the entire public procurement policy, is being led vigorously by President Moi and his Cabinet Secretary, Richard Leakey, who has a high reputation in that regard. There are several high-quality new appointments at permanent secretary level, some of whom I have met and who have come in from the private sector. Kenya has drifted into a serious state of decline and crisis. We want to work with the Government there to ensure that it emerges as quickly as possible.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): Does the Minister think that a good way to improve democracy and human rights in Kenya would be to invite the Kenyan

President to Britain on a state visit and then for the Foreign Office to conspire with the police to suppress demonstrators, take away their banners and—

Madam Speaker: Order. I was rather expecting that. The question is about Kenya, and I should be glad if the hon. Gentleman would stay with that subject.

Mr. Maples: I was suggesting that the Government might invite the Kenyan President to Britain and behave in that way, using police vans to hide demonstrators from the President, and scour the history books for some ancient byelaw that would allow the Government to declare demonstrations illegal.

Mr. Hain: No.

Mr. Maples: I expected a longer answer from a Minister who built his political career on being a student demonstrator. He was the Peter Pan of student activists for a very long time. Does he realise what kind of message the conduct of the Government during that visit sends to countries such as Kenya—that the Government, who claim to put human rights and democracy at the top of their agenda, are prepared to suppress even the right of free speech in Britain, so as not to offend a foreign Government? Would not Kenya rightly conclude that the Government's so-called ethical foreign policy means lecturing the small and weak, while kowtowing obsequiously to the big and strong?

Mr. Hain: Such artificial incandescence from the Opposition Front Bench was to be expected. May I inform the hon. Gentleman that I met President Moi in London last Friday, and that I was happy to do so? I will take no lectures from hon. Gentlemen on the Opposition Front Bench whose party, when it was in government, ignored human rights across the world, conspired with almost every dictatorship across the world that repressed its own people, and in the case of Kenya, allowed denials of human rights, attacks on democracy, increasing economic decline and the spread of corruption to go on year after year and did nothing about it. We are taking that agenda on and working with the Government of Kenya to promote human rights and economic recovery.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my hon. Friend aware that if Kenya is to maintain its democracy—a cause that the House of Commons should pursue devoutly, not treat as a light political ploy—it is important that it maintains its trade with Great Britain and with other European countries? Will he please keep a close eye on the negotiations relating to the Kenyan flour industry, which not only provides many jobs, but puts money into areas that previously were famine stricken? If that industry is lost to Kenya, many people will be in dire financial straits.

Mr. Hain: I agree with my hon. Friend, and we shall certainly do as she asks. We regard Kenya as one of the leading African nations. It should be restored to that leadership after being dragged down over the past 10 to 20 years. It is vital for the regeneration of east Africa—and of Africa as a whole, which is in a dire plight—that Kenya emerges from this situation and is able to play that leading democratic and economically successful role.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I do not believe that President Moi would recognise that caricature of the policy employed by my noble Friend Baroness Chalker when she was responsible for policy towards Kenya. As the Minister clearly believes the reassurance that he has received from President Moi, how long will he give him to come good on his promises?

Mr. Hain: We are monitoring the situation and working closely with the Kenyan Government in respect of their negotiations with the international financial institutions. For example, if an international finance loan were to become available—should the International Monetary Fund be satisfied at its board meeting that will take place shortly that the eligibility conditions have been met—we have made it clear that we would expect to see stage by stage progress as each tranche of loan support was released. If that progress was not forthcoming, the situation would be reviewed. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has made clear, the same goes for increases in aid, to which we are committed providing that Kenya continues to make the progress that it has promised. I have been given absolutely categorical assurances by the President that he is committed to the programme and we shall obviously be monitoring the situation closely.

Africa

11. **Ms Christine Russell** (City of Chester): If he will initiate new steps to improve conflict resolution procedures in Africa. [95041]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Peter Hain): We are working closely with the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations to find peaceful and lasting solutions to Africa's current conflicts, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Sudan and Angola.

Ms Russell: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that he is aware of the recent UN report highlighting the fact that 200 million people in Africa are undernourished and that Africa is the only continent where poverty is expected to increase in the next century. As his reply suggests, he will also be aware that thousands of women and children have recently lost their lives in the Angolan civil war. Can he expand his comments a little, particularly on the situation in Angola and how our Government are helping African countries to tackle their internal disputes and border conflicts?

Mr. Hain: After years of policy neglect of Africa and its needs by the Conservative Government, we have put African policy to the top of the international agenda. We are working with other European countries, the United States and, in particular, France to forge a new African agenda. I agree with my hon. Friend that the situation in Angola is dire and continues to be so, which is a reason why our decision to lead the world in banning landmines was absolutely vital. We shall continue to press for tight

sanctions on UNITA as well as on the Angolan Government to make sure that they invest in their people and ensure that Government support goes to them and not into the back pockets of an elite at the top.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Minister agree that the proliferation of arms in Africa is a major cause of instability, which leads to conflict? What progress has he made with our European partners on the control of arms brokers' activities?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Lady raises an important issue, because Africa is plagued by millions of small arms, which destroy countries and promote internal conflict. We are working with our European partners to deal with that problem. I particularly welcome the west African small arms moratorium. A few weeks ago in Kenya I discussed with the Foreign Minister that country's initiative to host a conference next year to tackle the problem of small arms in east and central Africa. We shall work with Kenya and other African countries to achieve that.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the Minister agree that arms control is the key to conflict resolution? Does he further agree that we need greater co-ordination between the Foreign Office, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence so that the Government may make some progress on their stated aims on those issues?

Mr. Hain: I agree with my hon. Friend, which is why we are co-ordinating our policy closely with both the MOD and the DTI. We are also working to promote conflict resolution and to provide peacekeeping support in Sierra Leone and, when it is opportune to do so, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Peace and stability are vital if the conflicts in that region are to be resolved, and we shall do everything that we can to achieve that.

Reparations (Germany)

12. **Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): If he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards reparations being paid to those who were used as slave labour in camps operated by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. [95042]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): We welcome the German Government's decision to organise, with German business, a fund to provide compensation for former forced and slave labourers who suffered under the Nazi regime. We are in touch with the German and other Governments, and have made it clear that we would expect equal access to the fund, when it is set up, for UK citizens who are eligible for such compensation.

Mr. Flight: The Government will be aware that there are between 500,000 and 1 million such slave labour survivors from the war. The German companies involved have made one somewhat derisory offer so far, and another offer is expected in the near future. Will the Government use all their endeavours to ensure that that offer is fair? Will they very diplomatically suggest to the new German ambassador that, if Germany wants Britain to forget the past and to look to the present and the future, this is just the sort of injustice that needs to be settled?

Mr. Vaz: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are not directly involved in the negotiations between the American lawyers and the German Government. As he says, the Germans made an offer of $2 billion, which was rejected by the Americans, and those negotiations are on-going. We have made it plain to all those involved that we take a keen interest in those matters. Indeed, the UK has taken a lead on this issue. In December 1997, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary convened the Nazi gold conference, which resulted in the UK donating £1 million to that cause—18 other countries donated a total of $60 million—and that money has been allocated. On this issue, if the interests of UK citizens are at stake, we shall make our views perfectly plain. We welcome what Chancellor Schröder has done. It is an important step forward and we hope that the negotiations will be successful.

Iraq

13. **Mr. Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): If he will make a statement on the progress of discussions with the UN Security Council with regard to Iraq. [95043]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): Britain continues to take the lead in brokering agreement on a new Security Council resolution on Iraq. We have made steady progress over six months of painstaking diplomacy, and our proposals are now supported by nine of the 10 non-permanent members. We have reached agreement on most of the earlier detailed points of difference, including those among permanent members of the Council. The resolution would provide for a major improvement in the humanitarian condition of the Iraqi people and the restoration of inspection and monitoring on the ground in Iraq, and would set out what Iraq must do to secure first the suspension, and then the lifting of sanctions. We believe that the revised draft provides the best basis for restoring consensus on Iraq within the Security Council.

Mr. Brake: I thank the Secretary of State for his response. Will he explain why the negotiations are taking so long? Is he confident that our proposals, if adopted, will begin to reduce the number of child deaths in Iraq, which have risen from 56 per 1,000 in 1989 to 131 per 1,000 in the period 1994-99?

Mr. Cook: I must be honest with the hon. Gentleman and tell him that these negotiations are taking some time because we are trying to broker agreement between member states that have different perspectives on this matter. We are nearly there. We have worked hard, and it would be wrong to rush the introduction of the resolution until there is consensus rather than division.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be a significant increase in immediate humanitarian funds available to Iraq. With co-operation, there is the prospect

of an increase in oil output as a result of the provision for investment by the oil industry in repairing Iraq's oil infrastructure.

The main culprit for the poor state of child health in Iraq is Saddam Hussein. It is striking to note that the child death rates are much higher in the parts of Iraq controlled by Saddam Hussein than they are in the areas of northern Iraq where the United Nations have intervened.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): My right hon. Friend may be aware of the important conference in New York this weekend organised by the United States Government. It was attended by 400 Iraqi opposition members from all over the world, who discussed the problems in Iraq. American politicians made their strongest statement yet on the indictment and prosecution of Saddam Hussein and his regime before an international criminal tribunal. Ambassador Scheffer, the ambassador for war crimes, said that there was no reason why the UN Security Council should not actively pursue that matter right away as there was no need to wait. Does my right hon. Friend agree with that view, and will we take up that call for Saddam Hussein's indictment and prosecution at the UN Security Council as soon as possible?

Mr. Cook: I applaud my hon. Friend's work on the indictment campaign, for which she has had the full support of the Foreign Office. A war crimes tribunal on Iraq would require consensus in the Security Council. We would be willing to support any realistic proposal that had a prospect of success, but we do not at present detect a consensus in the Security Council for a war crimes tribunal on Iraq. For the time being, I am anxious not to divert our diplomatic energy away from securing the resolution on humanitarian relief and the inspection regime on the ground in Iraq.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Saddam Hussein continues to pose a threat to security and peace in the middle east. What is the Foreign Secretary's assessment of where the Iraqi arms programme has got to in the absence of the UNSCOM inspection programme?

Mr. Cook: As the hon. Gentleman may know, it is difficult to be certain about what is happening on the ground in Iraq. That is why our resolution provides for the return of inspection and monitoring on the ground, and sets out a road map by which Iraq can secure the suspension of sanctions by co-operating with that inspection. However, we have no reason to believe that, over the months since Operation Desert Fox, the picture has changed radically. Saddam Hussein was trying to acquire a chemical and biological capability. Operation Desert Fox set back his capacity to deliver that capability.

Kosovo

14. **Mr. Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What progress is being made with the reconstruction of Kosovo. [95044]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): Assessment of the needs for reconstruction assistance have been carried out by the World bank and the European Commission, which are leading the international effort on the reconstruction of Kosovo. Their findings will be presented to a donors conference on 17 November. We fully support the efforts of the United Nations, the European Union and the Stability Pact for South-East Europe in their reconstruction efforts.

Mr. Coaker: I congratulate the Government on their humanitarian relief programme, and on the reconstruction work that has taken place. What progress is being made with the longer-term solutions to this problem, and with the economic and social reform that is necessary if there is to be real stability in Kosovo and in the region?

Mr. Vaz: I recognise my hon. Friend's interest in this matter, and I know that he has visited the region twice. At the last donors conference, the sum of $2.1 billion was set aside for support in Kosovo. The United Kingdom Government have given £10.65 million for emergency aid and restructuring, and the European Union has put aside 615 million euros. The reconstruction process goes on. It is right that we should concentrate on the infrastructure—schools, hospitals and the utilities—and that is what the United Nations and the EU representatives are doing. We shall ensure that the process continues.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): I am sure the Minister will agree that the reconstruction will be not just physical, but in terms of trust between the various people living in Kosovo. In that context, can he throw any light on the alarmist and sensationalist claims in newspapers during recent weeks relating to whether atrocities were actually perpetrated during the conflict?

Mr. Vaz: I do not normally comment on articles in *The Sunday Times*. The hon. Gentleman will be aware, however, that it was because of the atrocities committed in Kosovo that the allied forces took the actions that they took. The estimates that we have given in the past are, as far as we are concerned, accurate. We will continue to go along with the various examinations that are taking place, but it was because of the civilian casualties—because of the atrocities—that the British Government, the European Union and the United Nations acted as they did.

Albania

15. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): If he will make a statement about Britain's relations with Albania. [95046]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): Bilateral relations with Albania are excellent. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a visit in May this year during the Kosovo crisis. We will continue to work to develop relations at all levels.

I should like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to former Prime Minister Majko, who resigned last week, for the contribution that his Government made to the resolution of the Kosovo crisis and to the development of relations between our two countries. We wish his successor, Prime Minister Meta, every success, and trust that he will pursue the sensible policies of his predecessor.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank the Minister for his reply.

During a recent visit to Albania, we in the all-party Anglo-Albanian group saw a country struggling to establish democracy in the most difficult circumstances, while coping with mass unemployment resulting from the crash transition to a market economy, coping with the effects of the civil war in Kosovo, coping with trafficking in drugs, prostitution and arms, and coping with the fact that many of its social institutions were in a state of collapse. Will the Minister ensure that, while the international community concentrates—understandably—on Kosovo, Albania's needs are not forgotten? In particular, will he assure us that he will continue to support efforts to establish democracy and a renewal of civil society in that country?

Mr. Vaz: I am glad to learn that my hon. Friend has visited Albania. I am due to meet him and his colleagues in the all-party group later in the week. He is absolutely right: we must continue to support on-going efforts in Albania to ensure that democracy is strengthened, and that trade and co-operation continue. That is why the European Union established the stabilisation and association agreements—precisely to ensure that countries such as Albania become part of the European mainstream. We will continue the efforts that we are making.

As my hon. Friend knows, the Department for International Development has allocated £5 million to help with technical assistance and the establishment of civil government. We as a Government welcome the support that we have received from Albania. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited Albania on 18 May, and we will continue to work with the country, because we need its support and it needs our support.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Does the Minister agree that the work of the British Council and the BBC World Service is key to our relations with Albania and, indeed, the wider Balkan community? When I worked for the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe monitoring the 1996 elections in Albania, the World Service was the sole voice of reason. What additional support will the Minister give the World Service and the British Council, to further their work in the region?

Mr. Vaz: I can certainly give the World Service and the British Council the Government's full support. As a former vice-chairman of the British Council, I recognise the enormous amount of work that has been done. I am happy, and the Government are happy, to support the continued efforts that those organisations have made to ensure that the voices of reason and democracy are heard in the Balkans.

EU Reform

16. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): What response he has sent to recent proposals by an independent commission for reform of the EU institutions. [95047]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): The Dehaene report is an advisory document, feeding ideas into the Commission's internal thinking on the intergovernmental conference. It is for the Commission, not the Government, to decide how to react to its proposals.

Mr. Boswell: Does the Minister agree that it is very much in the interests of the central and eastern European applicant countries and of the future governance of the European Union itself that arrangements should be made to concentrate on doing what is necessary properly to respect the subsidiarity principle, and to reject the centralising tendency of the gang of three?

Mr. Vaz: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman, who has only recently entered the Chamber, was not in the House to hear the points of principle that were made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who reaffirmed our commitment to an IGC that is short and focused. Of course, enlargement will make a tremendous difference to the European Union—to the applicant countries and to the Union itself. Therefore, it is important that we look carefully at the way in which the IGC is to operate.

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): I congratulate the new Minister with responsibility for Europe on his appointment. It is the first opportunity that I have had to do so formally. I have no doubt that his renowned patience and good humour will be much needed in the difficult treaty negotiations ahead.

In the light of the formative implications for the EU and for this country's constitution of the treaty negotiations, will the Government undertake—as the previous Government did prior to Amsterdam—to set out their intentions in full, before any negotiations, in the form of a White Paper, for proper discussion by the House?

Mr. Vaz: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments. I wish that I could respond in the same happy vein.

The trouble with the hon. Gentleman is that he sees the European Commission as a branch of Asda. He cannot just pick and choose which bits of the Commission he wants. It is clear that the Government will set out their proposals properly—as they always have—at the time of the IGC.

Point of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A fortnight ago, I applied for an Adjournment debate on the reconstruction of Yugoslavia and, by some magic, you gave me the debate for last night, 1 November. The application was to the Foreign Office, not to the Department for International Development. As it happened, on a whole number of questions last night, the Minister answering for the DFID, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, said, "You really have to ask the Foreign Office or the Ministry of Defence."

When you give a Member an Adjournment debate, do you have any say about which Department replies? Can you insist that it is the Department to which that Adjournment debate is addressed? I notice that Question 6, which was accepted by the Table Office, asks:

"What assessment he has made of the reconstruction programme in Kosovo".

Reconstruction was the reason that was given by the Under-Secretary of State for International Development for his replying in the debate, but it seems that it was properly addressed to the Foreign Office.

Madam Speaker: I should like to correct two or three points that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I am a very generous Speaker, but I do not allocate Adjournment debates—the only one that I allocate is the Thursday night Adjournment debate. I want to make that clear to the House; my generosity does not stretch to every day. It is done entirely by ballot. The hon. Gentleman was successful, and I am pleased that he was. Which Minister responds to the debate has nothing to do with me. The Government determine the Minister to respond.

Cyclists' Helmets

3.34 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to promote the wearing of protective headgear by cyclists; and for connected purposes.

The impetus for the Bill comes from parents in my constituency who are keen for their children to ride bicycles, as it is good for their health, independence and confidence, and good for the environment, but want them to wear cycle helmets while they do so. While children are young, they are quite prepared to wear cycle helmets. However, just when they reach an age at which they are more independent, and it is possible for them to go out on their own and to cycle to school, they will not wear one. Parents, therefore, will not let them cycle, particularly to school.

Many children have bikes. Nevertheless, although 90 per cent. of junior school children in England own bikes, only one in four are allowed to use a bike as a mode of transport, rather than as merely something on which to play, and only one in 100 use a bike to go to school. Part of the reason for those figures has been elicited by a safe kids campaign organised by the Child Accident Prevention Trust. When mothers were asked what they feared most for their children's safety, 41 per cent. said road accidents involving cyclists or pedestrians.

Annually, about 200 cyclists are killed and 4,500 are seriously injured on Britain's roads. It is, therefore, understandable that parents should impose severe restrictions on their children's use of cycles on public roads. Moreover, the peak ages for cycling-related deaths are five to 24. About 70 per cent. of those killed and 50 per cent. of those seriously injured suffered serious head injury. However, several studies have indicated that wearing a cycle helmet reduces head injuries.

In an often-quoted study—which was reported in the *British Medical Journal*, in 1994—all cycle accident admissions to Addenbrooke's hospital, Cambridge were recorded over one year. Cambridgeshire has a higher proportion than most counties of those who cycle, and was therefore particularly appropriate for use in the study. The study showed that there were no significant differences between the type of accidents involving helmet wearers and non-helmet wearers, thereby refuting suggestions that helmet wearers are either more reckless or more careful than other cyclists.

The study also showed that there were no differences between the types of injuries sustained—with the exception of head injuries. The fact is that 4 per cent. of helmet wearers sustained injuries, compared with 11 per cent. of non-wearers. Moreover, as the sample size was so large, the results were highly significant. Adjusted results show a protective factor of 3.25 for wearing a helmet. In other words, the odds of head injury were significantly reduced—by a factor of three—for those wearing a helmet.

Additionally, the injuries sustained by those wearing a helmet were less severe. All patients in the study who sustained severe brain injury, including the two deaths that occurred, had not been wearing helmets.

I want to encourage cycling. Our children are becoming less fit, and there is growing concern about childhood obesity. There is also increasing concern about the traffic

[Ms Jean Corston]

congestion caused by the so-called school run. I make it clear, however, that I do not seek compulsion to wear a helmet, as compulsion could be counter-productive, at least in the short term. I want children to want to wear helmets.

I also do not put the entire responsibility for safety on cyclists—for whom we need to create a safer cycling environment. We need safe routes to schools, lower speed limits in towns and cities, cycle lanes, better cycling proficiency instruction, and cyclists to be at the forefront of transport and route planning.

I want a much more high-profile campaign, involving information, education and publicity, including mass media publicity by, for example, the Health Education Authority. I want schools, especially secondary schools, to recommend cycle helmets for journeys to and from school and off road. Many cycle injuries are cycle only accidents—in which a rider simply falls off a bike—for which helmets are particularly useful.

I want department stores to stock cycle helmets. Bristol city council recently conducted a survey showing that, usually, cycle helmets were available only from specialist cycle shops. I also want improved helmet design and style.

Teenagers are undoubtedly the group most resistant to helmet wearing—it seems to be an image problem. They think that wearing a helmet looks stupid or uncool, and can give rise to what is now called a "bad hair day", which I am told is a problem for boys as well as girls. I learned recently from some secondary school girls from my constituency that this is clearly more of a problem than it was in my day, and that teenage boys can use industrial quantities of hair gel in pursuit of a good hairdo. We must be able to tell them that it is possible to have a decent hairstyle and wear a helmet.

My hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) and for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) wear cycle helmets, and I am sure that they are well known in their constituencies. However, I hope that it will be possible for the campaign to enlist the support of role models who are more instantly recognised by the young. If, for example, Boyzone's next video showed them wearing cycle helmets while cycling, it might go some way towards encouraging young people to do so as well.

Above all, I want to enable parents positively to encourage their children to be active, mobile and independent. I accept that some cyclists believe that to promote helmet wearing is to pass the blame for a crash from the perpetrator to the victim, but all road users have responsibilities as well as rights. I know that the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the Child Accident Prevention Trust and the parliamentary advisory committee on transport safety all take the same view. Being able to cycle to school is an important step towards responsibility and independence.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Jean Corston, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Mr. David Drew, Ann Clwyd, Valerie Davey and Fiona Mactaggart.

Cyclists' Helmets

Ms Jean Corston accordingly presented a Bill to promote the wearing of protective headgear by cyclists; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 5 November, and to be printed [Bill 159].

Opposition Day

[14TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Planning

[Relevant documents: Tenth report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Session 1997-98, on Housing (HC495-I) and the Government's response thereto (Cm 4080); and Seventeenth Report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Session 1998-99, on Housing: PPG3 (HC490-I).]

Madam Speaker: I shall limit Back-Bench speeches to 10 minutes throughout. I have selected the amendment which stands in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.43 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I beg to move,

That this House regrets the growing divide between the prosperous and deprived areas of Britain; condemns the run-down of industry and the dereliction of inner city and old industrial areas; urges the Government to put in place better measures to encourage urban and industrial regeneration; vigorously opposes the idea that hundreds of thousands more people will be encouraged to move out of the urban areas into new housing on greenfield sites; further urges the Secretary of State to veto the South East plan for 1.1 million new homes, half on greenfield land, and to warn inspectors not to come to similar conclusions for other parts of the country; reminds the Government that there will be demand for new and better housing in the cities which they should help developers to meet by their planning and renewal policies; and stresses that sustainable development means limiting greenfield housing construction.

Our motion draws attention to yet another great disappointment from the Government. Before the election, we were promised so much. We were promised that the green fields would at last be safe and that not much building, if any, would be needed on them. Miraculously, the Government would bring forward the brownfield sites for development. The face of England would be improved, and it would all be sweetness and light.

Instead, we see a group of people taking a carpet knife to an old master. They are scoring the tapestry of England with their concrete and their plans for a massive invasion of new homes on the green fields.

Mr. David Taylor (North–West Leicestershire): Who wrote this?

Mr. Redwood: I am not reading—I am making a speech. I have a few notes, but my speech will get better as it goes along, if the Government provoke me sufficiently. I have not really begun yet. I promise the hon. Gentleman that there will be far more charges against this miserable Government as the debate proceeds. My hon. Friends are here in force today because the issue affects every one of their constituencies. They will be speaking up for their constituents, and we only hope that Labour Members will speak up for theirs. They must know that their constituents do not want their greenfield sites wrecked any more than ours do.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My right hon. Friend mentions our constituents, but does he have in mind also the interests of our councillors? Does he believe that if councillors reflect the view of local people who do not want large developments in their area, those developments should not go ahead?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend has foreseen something that I shall propose later in my speech. As part of our common-sense revolution—which is much needed in this country after two years of this miserable Government—we believe that local authorities in prosperous, low-unemployment areas, such as that for which my hon. Friend speaks, should be able to say no to more housing. We believe that they know best, and that there is no reason to swamp those areas with further house building that they do not want.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): If the Conservative party is such a staunch defender of the green belt, why has Rawdon Conservative club in my constituency so vigorously pursued a planning application to build in a special landscape area within the local green belt? Is it because the Tories' attitude to the green belt is dependent on whether they are chasing votes or chasing cash?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman must try better than that. If he had been listening to my remarks, he would have heard me say that I believe in local determination, based on local opinions. I am sure that local councillors can come to a better solution than Ministers.

Mr. Truswell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: No. The hon. Gentleman had his chance, and he made a mess of it. He does not get a second chance.

The positions set out by Ministers before and after the election have been so different from the reality that people will feel let down and disappointed. On 25 January 1997—a few weeks before the general election—the Minister for the Environment, then the shadow spokesman on these matters, said:

"Above all we must not allow our countryside, our precious green space, to become easy prey to developers and speculators."

How did he have the gall to say that, when he now sits as a Minister in a Department that is contemplating 1.1 million new homes in the south-east, compared with the 670,000 that local authorities think, at a pinch, could be fitted in? That is a massive increase, which the Government are taking seriously and may well recommend.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Minister for the Environment has a third home in my constituency, and that he wanted to fell trees in an area of outstanding natural beauty to make way for a tennis court for himself?

Mr. Redwood: I have often heard of "from chainsaw to chainstore", but I have never heard of "from chainsaw to tennis court for a Minister". That does not surprise me, as we have seen the Minister make so many lunatic assertions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] Where is he, indeed? This is his subject. At the Labour party conference recently, he recommended a major change in

[Mr. Redwood]

Government policy to prevent other people from buying second homes, as he has done. Has that suggestion been roundly condemned by Ministers, or is it still on the agenda? It seemed a bit much for a man who is called "Three Mansions Meacher" by the tabloid press to recommend that others should not even have the option of buying a second home in certain areas.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a demographic change in this country, whereby families are getting smaller, and therefore there will be far greater need for households in the future? If so, where are those people going to live if he thinks we should not be building new homes anywhere?

Mr. Redwood: There may well be some increase in households. That is why we are recommending more building on brownfield sites, and the redevelopment of city centres. The Government have forecast that more young people will want to form their own household at an earlier age. That may well happen, and if they have the income to do so, good luck to them.

Very often, those young people would rather live in a town or city centre. They want to go out on a Saturday evening to the pubs and clubs, and they want to return long after the trains and buses have stopped. They cannot drive home to a suburban location because of the drink-and-drive laws. It would be much better if housing was made available in the centres of towns and cities at prices they could afford. Many of them are priced out of London, where house prices are high.

We need to bring on more brownfield development, as the Conservatives were doing through the massive redevelopment of the London docklands. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for Housing and Planning roars with laughter. He knows he is on a weak point here. Some 24,000 new dwellings were constructed in the London docklands during our period in office and just beyond, as a result of a massive brownfield project.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North–East Hertfordshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that all too often, as has happened in Hertfordshire, although the need is assessed on the basis of arguments about young people leaving home, what is built is not homes for young people, but three or four-bedroomed detached houses? In Hertfordshire, we are now having to contemplate the idea of 2,000 acres of green belt being destroyed, and a massive new target being imposed on top of that, which will destroy the character of my constituency. That is an outrage.

Mr. Redwood: I agree with my hon. Friend.

When he was first appointed, the Secretary of State said that he would get rid of "predict and provide". Yet now we see his inspectors and advisers continuing that system, and predicting far more demand than was ever predicted under the Conservatives. We are close to hearing a statement from the right hon. Gentleman that he will insist on all those homes being provided. He has not got away from predict and provide at all. The soundbite says that he has, but the reality is the opposite.

The right hon. Gentleman is not even here today, because he does not think it important enough to come to the House and debate the issue.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford) *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: The Minister will say that because of due process, he cannot yet tell us what the Government will do in the south-east—but I say that due process would allow the Secretary of State to tell us today, or whenever he wished, that 1.1 million was an absurd prediction for the south-east and that he wanted a better answer. I would back the Minister and the Secretary of State if they came to the House to kill predict and provide once and for all, and to give us a better policy. We are ready for that today. Where is the Secretary of State?

Mr. Raynsford: As I explained to the right hon. Gentleman when we met half an hour ago, the Deputy Prime Minister is attending an important international conference on carrying forward this country's Kyoto commitments on the environment. I am sorry that he has chosen to ignore what I told him and to cast an undeserved slur on my right hon. Friend. I hope that he will now withdraw that slur.

Mr. Redwood: I cast no slur; I said that I thought that the Secretary of State should be here because we regard the subject of the debate as the most important green issue facing the country. He could do something about it today if he were here, because we would back him. With his huge ministerial team at the Department, he could have taken part in the earlier session, and then returned from Germany on an appropriate flight. His Minister for the Environment, a senior figure, could have stayed to deal with such issues, to which he might have been better suited than issues concerning housing and people with three homes.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): The right hon. Gentleman has a selective memory. Under the previous Government, the target for brownfield development was 50 per cent., and only 42 per cent. was achieved. Under the present Government it is at least 60 per cent.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Lady has obviously not read the report on the south-east in which Government inspectors say that only half the total will be built on brownfield sites, and that the Government intend both to increase the total and to reduce the proportion to be built on brownfield sites, compared with their aspirations. They forecast a massive surge of new housing in the south-east, well above the targets set under the Conservatives, and also above the targets that we thought the present Government would set when they were operating according to a different percentage for greenfield sites.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Has my right hon. Friend been able to get to the bottom of the Government policy that says that although they want more and more houses to be built, they totally refuse to sanction any of the bypasses that their housing policy makes necessary? The Government know that Labour-controlled Weymouth and Portland borough council has been trying to get a

bypass in connection with the Dorchester relief road since shortly after the war, yet they will not even tell us whether the idea has been put forward to the Treasury.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right; that is one of the absurdities of Government policy. If more were built in the cities, the units of accommodation would be close to bus routes and train stations, and there would be more chance of the people who lived in them making more journeys by public transport. Building on green fields means building homes in the middle of nowhere, where there are no stations or bus routes, so all the families who live there will be dependent on the car. Then the Government dare to cut all the road schemes that could make some sense out of their damaging policies.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): My right hon. Friend will be aware that both at Rio and Kyoto, the British Government signed up to the principle of sustainable development. Does he agree that the decision taken by the Deputy Prime Minister to override his inspectors' decision in West Sussex, and vastly increase the number of houses to be built there, is contrary to all the principles to which Her Majesty's Government signed up? Will he ensure that they are held to account to honour their obligations?

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point; he is absolutely right. Holding the Government to account is what we are trying to do in the debate; I hope that my hon. Friends will be able to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, so that we can make some progress.

The Government have already let down many local communities; 10,000 new houses are to be foisted on an area of green fields between Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead; 2,500 houses are to be built on green fields just outside Newcastle, despite the fact that there are 4,000 empty homes in the city itself. There are to be 90,000 new homes for Devon; they are not wanted, and will be difficult to accommodate in that beautiful part of our countryside.

The Government have overturned inspectors' advice against greenfield development near Sutton Coldfield. That really beggars belief. For once, the inspectors get it right, but the Secretary of State turned down their advice.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): The right hon. Gentleman makes some important points about greenfield housing development. Will he, therefore, contact Conservative-controlled Wyre borough council and encourage it to support my contention that, for the next 21 years, we need no further greenfield housing development in the Wyre district?

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is off-message, and that he agrees with our campaign for green fields. I am sure that he is a quite persuasive local Member; he must contact his council and ensure that he speaks for it and for the local community when he takes such an unusually brave approach against his own Front-Bench colleagues. However, I hope that he will persuade his Front-Bench colleagues that they should think again, because England is up in anger over the forces that are being unleashed by the Government's planning policies.

Even the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee was critical of the Government. I was pleased that it dismissed the evidence of the Minister for Housing and Planning as vacuous and disingenuous. I should not dream of being so rude, but that comment was made by a Labour-dominated Select Committee, whose members had heard the Minister for themselves. They realised that his posturing on greenbelt and greenfield issues was just that, and that he would undermine the green belt and wreck the green fields.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): May I make it absolutely clear that the Select Committee's remarks had nothing to do with the greenfield issue? They related to the provision of social housing. If the right hon. Gentleman is so keen on the policy that he promotes, how will he ensure that families, who have traditionally lived in city areas, are able to find accommodation so that their children and grandchildren can remain there in future?

Mr. Redwood: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the Select Committee said that the Minister had made vacuous remarks. I thought that the whole point of the report was that some of those houses would have to be built on green fields. My case rests with all those who read the report. Of course, we want a range of provision—through public and private activity—so that people can have decent homes. That is why we want vigorous promotion of brownfield development, and inner-city and town development of the type that I shall describe.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, because his words will certainly strike a chord in my constituency and elsewhere. Is he aware that the people of Buckinghamshire in general, and Mr. Nick Nash, the leader of the Haddenham protection society in my constituency, in particular, are in open revolt against the recommendation of the Crow panel to dump another 92,000 homes on our county? They are simply not prepared to allow vast tracts of beautiful Buckinghamshire countryside to submit to the concrete mixer. They believe that any Secretary of State who could accept such ludicrous proposals must have taken leave of his senses.

Mr. Redwood: As always, my hon. Friend understates his case; I quite agree with him.

We want the Government to come up with some answers on urban regeneration. Some time ago, they commissioned a report—

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: I must make some progress; many hon. Members want to speak in the debate.

The Government commissioned a report, and the Opposition welcome it; we think that it contains many good measures, although we do not agree with all its 105 recommendations. However, we agree with some of the larger ones. I have constantly asked the Government to tell us which recommendations they agree with, and what they intend to do about them. I hope that the Minister will have done his homework—albeit belatedly—and will

[Mr. Redwood]

come up with some answers today. Do the Government agree with the suggestion in the Rogers report, "Towards an Urban Renaissance", that they should

"limit greenfield land releases and channel development into redeveloping urban, brownfield sites."?

It would be a good start if they stated that they want to do that, and dismissed the inspectors who want them to do the opposite.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Redwood: I must make some progress.

Do Ministers agree that the Government should

"require public bodies and utilities to release redundant urban land and buildings for regeneration . . . launch a national campaign to bring all contaminated land back into beneficial use"

and

"introduce an empty property strategy in every borough",

especially in Labour boroughs, which are rather bad at that sort of thing? Do they agree that they should

"harmonise VAT on new build and residential conversions"

preferably at zero per cent.? That would be welcome to people who are trying to do up properties in urban areas. Do Ministers believe in introducing

"Urban Priority Areas where regeneration can be undertaken by dedicated companies, assisted by streamlined planning decisions, easier land acquisition, tax incentives and additional resources"?

Do they agree that they should

"make the need for an urban renaissance a key objective in allocating public expenditure across government"?

Do they want to

"establish a Renaissance Fund for local groups to improve their own neighbourhoods"?

Those are some of the meatier recommendations in the report, which met with a deafening silence from the Government. We are now giving them Opposition time in which to make their intentions clearer.

The kernel of Lord Rogers's report is interesting, sharing language with the Opposition's motion. The report states that

"there is a real danger that too much greenfield land will be released in regions where it is not really needed, while excess demand for housing in London and the South East will lead to 'overheating' in the housing market and yet more countryside being annexed for development. Yet it need not happen that way provided we choose to manage our land and building assets in different, more imaginative ways."

The report then goes on to make suggestions in that respect.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): My right hon. Friend mentioned Devon in passing. The recommendations for Devon, if followed through by the Labour Government, would mean the population of that county increasing by 27 per cent. The spread of the concrete jungle to such a beautiful part of the west country is entirely unacceptable and cannot be allowed to happen.

Mr. Redwood: I agree. Not only is it unacceptable in Devon, but such a process is unacceptable to the exporting towns, cities and regions, because such areas need talented, dynamic people who have decent incomes, and the opportunity to create jobs and set up businesses. We must not allow too many of those people to drift from the cities to the green fields because we have failed the cities and let them down.

Something must be done and that is why we have launched 10 green pledges to make a real difference. I shall not take up the House's time setting out all 10 of our important pledges, because I know that my hon. Friends are impatient to make their own speeches. However, as part of our common-sense revolution, we believe that local people should make local decisions through their local councils, where it makes sense to do so because unemployment is low and the green fields are at risk. That is a pledge that we offer to local communities.

We believe that regenerating towns and cities is fundamental, hence our extreme disappointment at the cuts in regeneration budgets that we witnessed during the first two years of the Labour Government. We see in their plans for the period after the next election that the Government intend to increase public expenditure on those items, if they are still in office and if they choose to see those plans through. However, why did the Minister cut regeneration expenditure in the first couple of years? Does he realise that that expenditure was £1,415 million in the last year of the Conservative Government and £1,291 million in 1998-99?

Mr. Raynsford: It was the Conservatives' Budget.

Mr. Redwood: Of course it was not. Does the Minister not realise that Conservative Budgets always had contingency funds and emergency money to top up individual Budget items year after year? We looked at the position each year and adjusted the Budget accordingly. The Labour Government took over in 1997 and they were responsible for the Budgets from the day they did so: they were not Conservative Budgets, but Budgets considered and endorsed by a Labour Cabinet. The Labour Government changed some of the lines in those Budgets, so why did they not change the one relating to regeneration expenditure, if they thought it was an important matter? The simple truth is that the Government could not have cared less about the cities—they turned their back on them and decided to go ahead and build on the green fields instead.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the characteristics of the Labour Government is that they always claim that whatever goes wrong is the fault of their predecessors? Now, even the media have accepted that the Government have to take responsibility for their own mistakes. If the Government were to accept Professor Crow's panel's recommendations, there is no doubt that, in the eyes of the British people, the Government would be responsible for the wholesale destruction of the green fields throughout the south of England. The Labour party once took pride in being representative of the north and the midlands; if the Labour Government abandon the regeneration of the north and the midlands, they will never be forgiven. Professor Crow's methodology must be rejected root and branch.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that important point. I hope that the Minister not only listened to him, but can offer some comfort.

Millions of people are very worried for their rural views and landscapes and the beauty of the England they love. It is within the power of Ministers either to move in the people's direction by saying in this debate that they have no intention of despoiling on the scale that their inspectors recommend or—and I fear that this is what they will do—to leave people fearful of seeing our green fields deluged with concrete, while sending no real message of hope to the cities and towns that are under pressure.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): My right hon. Friend might also reflect upon the damage that the Government are doing in that developers think it is worth while to purchase greenfield sites on the basis that, if they hang on to them for some time, the Government will grant planning permission on appeal, overriding the wishes of local people.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right.

My message to the Government is: "Make up your mind and honour your promises for a change". The Government must spare the green fields, redevelop the brownfield sites and do something good for the cities upon which they have turned their back so noticeably in the past two years. They must rebuild the regeneration budgets and the cities, and we will be with them. The Government must not threaten the green fields further. The Secretary of State must come to the House of Commons, apologise for the inspector's report and start again.

4.6 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the Government's continued commitment to sustainable growth, safeguarding the countryside and promoting an urban renaissance; welcomes the establishment of Regional Development Agencies and the policies and programmes which have been put in place to improve the prosperity and quality of life of the regions and supports the targeting of regeneration initiatives in areas of greatest need; recognises that the Government's integrated, inclusive and strategic approach is encouraging urban and industrial regeneration; welcomes the Government's inter-linked policies for revitalising the UK's towns and cities and protecting the countryside; supports the Government's target for building 60 per cent. of all new housing on previously developed land and welcomes the new housing planning policy guidance which encourages "in town" brownfield site development first under a phased sequential test; supports this Government's approach to new out-of-town shopping developments; welcomes the Government's move away from the previous "predict and provide" approach to housing provision and the introduction of a "plan, monitor and manage" policy under the new regional planning policy arrangements, including Examination in Public and Independent Panel assessment; recognises the need for a more detailed evaluation of land availability and capacity and welcomes the establishment of a National Land Use Database; supports the Government's policies on protecting the Green Belt; and believes the Government's planning, housing, transport, countryside protection, welfare and economic policies will achieve more sustainable and equitable patterns of both urban and rural development."

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on managing to choose such a topical subject. It is topical for several reasons—not least because the right hon. Gentleman has devised it as a means of breaking with the past and of disowning both the approach taken by the previous Conservative Government and the policies for which he took collective responsibility within that Government.

The right hon. Gentleman claims that he has adopted and now advocates a new Conservative view of planning: he calls it a common-sense revolution in planning. Let us look at what he proposes. Instead of planning for prosperity, the right hon. Gentleman's proposals would stop housing development, irrespective of the economic and social consequences. They would fuel house price inflation, increase homelessness and reduce labour mobility. The economy would be severely damaged. We always thought of the right hon. Gentleman as a free marketeer, but he has now been revealed as an interventionist who has masqueraded as a free marketeer all these years.

The Conservative party would foster the divide that has always bedevilled Tory thinking: the divide between the rich and the poor. That is fine for the privileged, but not for the rest. It is rich that the Opposition have suddenly discovered a new-found enthusiasm for taking account of community views. Under the previous Administration, central Government overrode the decisions of local communities again and again. Central Government prepared the draft regional strategy, including housing numbers, and then revised the final version following a very limited consultation exercise. "Predict and provide" was the Conservative philosophy and approach, which the right hon. Gentleman now condemns.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does the Minister recognise that the rich and the poor alike benefit from the countryside? I represent a rural constituency to which many tourists come every day of the week to benefit from its outstanding natural beauty. I have asked the Secretary of State to visit my area, but he refuses to do so. A small village in my constituency, with only 200 or so houses, is to be swamped by several hundred new houses. Will the Minister please take action to protect the people of Whittingham, who moved to the countryside because they enjoy it? There is such a thing as non-planning gain, which is what we want for the countryside.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that both rich and poor benefit from the countryside, which is why the Government are acting to protect it. *[Interruption.]* We are acting to protect the countryside and we are ensuring that a far greater proportion of development is on brownfield sites than the Conservative party ever achieved. Conservative Members should hang their heads in shame because their Government's record was a disgrace and they are now saying that they are disowning that Government's policies.

Let me return to the point raised by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). Although the rich and the poor can equally enjoy the beauty of the countryside, it is the poor who lose out and who end up homeless if there is a shortage of housing. That is why the hon. Gentleman's party should give thought to ensuring that we have an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of every section of the community. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree with that principle.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I give way to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), who is knowledgeable on this subject.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I am listening to the Minister's arguments with astonishment, because his

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

policy, if he accepts the Crow report, of putting 1.1 million houses into south-east England will draw out the most economically active people from the areas most in need of economic regeneration—the midlands, the north-east and the north-west—and precisely those city centres that face the greatest challenge of urban decay. The Minister will simply make that position worse unless that ridiculous policy is overturned.

Mr. Raynsford: I am rather disappointed in the remarks of the hon. Gentleman, who came to see me last week. We discussed that matter, and as he knows perfectly well, it is not the Government's policy to build an additional 1.1 million homes in the south-east. Rather, that is a recommendation from the panel that was chaired by Professor Crow. That is one of the factors that we shall take into account when we make our decision, but he knows that it is not Government policy. He should not build up fears and anxieties among people in the countryside on the basis of false allegations.

Mr. Blunt: Will the Minister then explain why, when I wrote to every Member of Parliament representing a constituency in the south-east, not one Labour Member chose to join me in recommending to the Minister that he reject that proposal? What are people in the south-east supposed to think is the Government's intention if none of their supporters will speak out against that proposal?

Mr. Raynsford: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to apologise for his previous remarks. I shall take up the subject of his letter in a moment, and I think he will be surprised at the answer that I shall give him.

Ms Ward: Is my hon. Friend aware that as one of the Members who received a copy of the hon. Gentleman's letter, I decided not to support him because I wanted to make my own representations, which would not be coloured by his party's hypocrisy?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a good point.

Mr. Soames: I thank the Minister for giving way—he is being extremely generous with his time. Will he accept, without blaming the previous Administration, that the proposals for Mid-Sussex, where the Deputy Prime Minister has overturned his own inspector's report, will mean more houses being built in an area where there is not enough water, there are not enough roads, there are not enough schools and there is not enough hospital space? More houses will mean more people and more cars. Sussex is facing "Carmageddon". How can the hon. Gentleman seriously propose that his Government are following a policy of sustainable development when he is butchering the south-east of England?

Mr. Raynsford: I make two points to the hon. Gentleman. The first is that it is very easy to insist that an inspector's report is followed when one agrees with it, but I put it to the hon. Gentleman that the right hon. Member for Wokingham is absolutely adamant, as are most of his colleagues, that we should not accept Professor Crow's report. The fact that a report is by an inspector does not determine whether or not it should be implemented. Obviously, the Secretary of State has to form a judgment.

In Sussex, as the hon. Gentleman knows well, the under-provision in the county's housing proposals, which are 25 per cent. below the figures set by the Conservative Government, was such that the Government felt that they were inadequate and therefore directed that county uniquely to increase its housing provision. The county challenged the Secretary of State's decision in the High Court, and lost. I rest my case.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: As hon. Members know, I have already given way several times. I want to make progress, then I shall give way to colleagues on both sides of the House.

Let us contrast the previous Government's approach—predict and provide—with our new arrangements for regional planning. Under our arrangements, local planning authorities, which are getting together at regional level with other stakeholders, are preparing the draft. That draft is then subject to a public examination. That process has been undergone in both the eastern region and the south-east.

The public examination exposes the hard issues; it does not hide them behind closed doors in Whitehall. This debate, and tomorrow's on housing in the south-east, illustrate the way in which, under this Administration, the real issues are exposed and can be publicly discussed. We may not agree on all issues—they are difficult—but they are all debated in public. Previously, decisions were taken behind closed doors—and former Ministers know it, because they were party to that procedure.

Mr. Redwood: In that spirit of openness, does the Minister understand that, unless he says today that 1.1 million new homes in the south-east is far too much and intolerable, he will go down as one of the bulldozer boys—the beaver boys—who are trying to fill in the countryside with concrete?

Mr. Raynsford: I am pretty disappointed in the right hon. Gentleman. As a former Secretary of State, he knows perfectly well that there is a due process for considering representations on such matters. To pre-empt consideration with the unilateral declaration for which he is calling may go down well in a school debating society, but is not serious politics—and he knows that. We shall make clear in due course our decision on the proposals of the south-east regional planning conference and the panel report of Professor Crow and his colleague. In the meantime, I have made it perfectly clear in this debate that the proposal for 1.1 million new homes is not Government policy. We shall consider that proposal along with other evidence.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I give way to the right hon. Gentleman for the final time.

Mr. Redwood: We are talking about more than just evidence; the proposal is the conclusion of the Minister's

inspectors. Until he disowns it, people will naturally assume that he and the Secretary of State are sympathetic to it. Will he give us a date by which we shall be put out of our misery? People out there want to know. The Minister cannot go on for ever. It seems obvious what must be done with the report. How long will it take the Secretary of State to make up his mind?

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that the details of regional planning guidance are complex and numerous. We shall make a decision as soon as it is possible to do so. That is a serious response. We believe in speeding up the planning process; we do not believe in hanging around and delaying such processes However, serious issues need consideration. Household numbers are one of hundreds of different issues, all of which need to be considered. When we produce our response, it will be comprehensive on all issues.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall make some progress.

This Administration are determined to ensure that development is sustainable and has proper regard to environmental considerations and infrastructure constraints. That is why we put so much emphasis on the need for a sustainability appraisal of development proposals. A properly informed debate may then take place, and development be planned where it is sustainable. That of course includes maximising the potential of brownfield sites.

Let us look at the record on brownfield development.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No, I want to make some progress.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham is only too happy to talk about more brownfield development today, but what was his record when his party was in government? From 1985 to 1995, only 42 per cent. of land used for housing was previously developed land. That was the Conservatives' record in government.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): May I remind my hon. Friend that he and I began a brownfield development in my constituency when I was leader of Hove council, and that that development, on which there are now 75 housing units, was opposed by local Conservatives and the Conservative Government?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I remember well the start of development on that site, which had been occupied by housing owned by a notorious bad landlord, who had neglected the properties scandalously and left many empty. It was absolutely right of my hon. Friend and his colleagues on Hove council to take action to secure that brownfield site for decent housing development.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I give way to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke).

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Before the Minister continues his attempt to ascribe to the previous Government everything that is bad about the present policy and to describe the changes that he is making, may I direct him to a part of the country where his rhetoric has made no difference at all?

An adopted county structure plan, put forward by Labour-controlled Nottinghamshire county council on the basis of old policies, purports to suggest an unacceptable demand for dwellings throughout Nottinghamshire. Conservative-controlled Rushcliffe, which is rural and suburban and has few brownfield sites, wishes to reduce the allocation made to it. Labour-controlled Mansfield and Labour-controlled Nottingham city council wish to have more dwellings allocated to them for purposes of urban regeneration and making use of derelict land.

The Government's attitude has been to ally with Labour-controlled Nottinghamshire county council to refuse to reopen any of the decisions in the structure plan. All the districts are proceeding under a legal liability to provide a number of dwellings. For two years now, all the rhetoric about new targets for brownfield sites and about saving greenfield sites has made no practical difference on the ground in Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Raynsford: I put two points to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. First, as a former Secretary of State, he well knows that one cannot simply terminate processes overnight. A process must be continued until new procedures replace it. Otherwise, there will be a vacuum in which any developer may appeal to the Secretary of State in the absence of a development plan; and in the absence of a plan, that leads to appeal-led decisions—the worst of all worlds. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that a plan-led system is better. That is why we are moving from the old system to the new one.

Secondly, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware of PPG3, the Government's new planning guidance on housing provision, which makes it very clear that it is now appropriate to apply a sequential approach to new housing developments. That guidance has been issued for consultation; we have had a very interesting and positive response on it and very shortly we shall issue the final version. All that is the process of changing from the old system to the new one. That change is taking place. It is a radical change, with a strong emphasis on getting the building on to brownfield sites in the cities.

Miss Kirkbride *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way once more to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but then I must make progress.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene twice. I understand that the new PPG3 does not affect the legal liability on Rushcliffe borough council to allocate land for 14,400 new dwellings in one borough—one constituency—that is largely rural and suburban. All the changes described by the Minister have made no practical difference to a legal requirement to

[Mr. Clarke]

make greenfield sites available for a vast amount of development. Unless he takes some action that changes things, I shall regard his new policy as mere empty words.

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to PPG3. He will see that it recommends, and when fully implemented will oblige, authorities to approach land allocation in a sequential way. It will therefore be open to Rushcliffe to give priority to its brownfield sites rather than to greenfield sites. I am sure that that is exactly the policy that he would like.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I must now make progress.

The building that took place on greenfield sites throughout the 1980s and 1990s reflected the laissez-faire attitude under which development was allowed to run riot under the previous Government. It is no use the current Opposition trying to pretend that they had nothing to do with that. Many members of the current Opposition, including the right hon. Member for Wokingham, served in that Government and accepted collective responsibility for their policies. He himself made an even more significant contribution. Between 1993 and 1995, he was Secretary of State for Wales. I am sure that he remembers that period in his career—and its abrupt end.

As I prepared for this debate, I thought that it would be interesting to discover what fraction of new development in Wales during the term of office of the right hon. Member for Wokingham took place on brownfield sites. Little did I expect the answer that emerged. No Labour spin doctor could have given me a better answer. I shall let the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues into a secret: no one knows what proportion of new development in Wales in that period was on greenfield or brownfield sites. Why? Because under the right hon. Gentleman's regime, the Welsh Office did not bother to check figures on the greenfield-brownfield split because it was "too costly" to maintain such an analysis.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No, there is better yet to come.

That reveals the leopard's true spots—the old free marketeer advocate of laissez-faire. That was the record of the right hon. Member for Wokingham in government. When he had his chance to do something about the matter, he did not care. Now that he is in opposition, he makes a great fuss trying to convince the public that he does care, but it will not wash. His own record reveals the truth.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way in a moment, but the right hon. Gentleman must hear a little more. His pious protestations today sound hollow and insincere when contrasted with his performance in government. They sound even more hollow and insincere when put in the context of a letter delivered to me last Friday by 67 Opposition Members representing constituencies in the south-east. The hon. Member for Reigate took the trouble to come in person to present the letter to me, and we had a useful and frank discussion in my office at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

I undertook to the hon. Member for Reigate to consider the letter carefully. I have done so. I have considered not just its contents, but the signatures. Among the 67 signatures are many familiar names, but one is strikingly missing. The right hon. Member for Wokingham forgot to sign the letter from his own party.

Mr. Blunt: My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and the other members of the Conservative team chose not to sign the letter, precisely because they were members of the Conservative team. The letter was designed to be a cross-party approach, which it was, although sadly only with the Liberal Democrats. There was a total absence of support from Labour Back Benchers, who appear to have had their spines removed, like the nation's cattle.

Mr. Raynsford: The House will draw its own conclusions. The hon. Gentleman condemns Labour Members for not signing a letter, when hon. Members on his own Front Bench did not bother to sign it.

Mr. Redwood: The Minister should do a lot better than that. He knows that I have raised the issue in several speeches. I have been in touch with the Secretary of State on the matter. My hon. Friends have my full support in their initiative.

The Minister's point is not a cheap debating point; it is simply a wrong-headed debating point. If he cares to check my record a little more carefully, he will see that when I was Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, I set out policies for regeneration of inner cities and for brown land development, and saw some of them through in government, and that what I said in 1992 is entirely consistent with what I have said today and what I did in Wales.

Mr. Raynsford: I have checked the record, and I am about to quote some more of it to the right hon. Gentleman. I hope that he is looking forward to it. Carelessness appears to be the hallmark of the right hon. Gentleman's approach.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No.

Yesterday the television showed a film of the right hon. Member for Wokingham alongside an area of greenfield land about to be developed for housing in Berkshire. Indeed, I believe that he used that location to launch his 10 green pledges. Presumably, he was trying to imply that greenfield development in Berkshire is the kind of undesirable greenfield development that would not be allowed under a Conservative Government. The right hon. Gentleman is nodding. I must tell him and his colleagues that the development of greenfield land in Berkshire for housing is the direct result of the actions of the previous Conservative Government.

Mr. Redwood: Wrong.

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman has revealed himself to be rather forgetful, but I should have

thought that he would take the elementary precaution of researching the background to current house building in Berkshire.

Has the right hon. Gentleman forgotten the direction issued to Berkshire county council to increase its housing numbers? No, it was not a direction from this Government. It was a direction made by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who in many respects has a good record on the environment. I regret that he is not in his place today.

Mr. Redwood: I deliberately sought to highlight the fact that it was a Labour-Liberal council that said that all houses must be lumped together and placed on those green fields, against my advice and the advice of many Conservatives, and to highlight the fact that the Labour Government, far from making the situation better, are making it worse. Two other villages are now threatened because the Government are upping the figures for Berkshire.

Mr. Raynsford: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman is digging an even deeper pit for himself. He recognises that it was his Conservative Government who issued the direction to Berkshire county council to increase the numbers. That direction told local people in Berkshire not that they could decide how many homes should be built in their area, as the right hon. Gentleman is now suggesting should be the case, but instead that they must have an additional 3,000 new homes, because the Government—the Conservative Government—told them so. That is what the Tories did in power, and it is grotesque hypocrisy for them to present themselves as champions of both local discretion and greenfield land.

What did the right hon. Gentleman do about that diktat from the Government requiring his county to build more housing? Did he complain? Did he protest? Did he issue press releases? Did he hell. To be charitable, he may have been otherwise engaged. His mind may have been diverted because the direction was made in June 1995, when his thoughts were perhaps on challenging the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) for the leadership of the Conservative party.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater) *rose—*

Mr. Paterson *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way, but I suggest that the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who is getting a little excited, restrains himself for a moment. I accept that he had other things on his mind, but despite his attempt to seize the high prize of the leadership of the Conservative party, could he not have spared a moment to look after the interests of the countryside in his own county of Berkshire, which he now pretends to champion? Could he not have issued one press release to match the confetti of press releases that he is now issuing on the subject? No. He did not care; he did not lift a finger to stop local decision making being overruled by the Conservative Government. He did not lift a finger to save Berkshire greenfield sites from development when the Conservative Government were in power and it is nonsense for him to masquerade as the defender of greenfield sites and local democracy.

Mr. Redwood: The Minister is misleading the House over this. He should remember that before 1997 those green fields were not in my constituency: they were in that of a colleague. He should also know that I was extremely critical of overdevelopment on the green fields throughout that period, but I still regarded the main problem as the Labour-Liberal council, which decided to lump all the houses together and build them on green fields instead of on reclaimed land in places such as Slough and Reading. I recommended building on brownfield sites in Slough and Reading and he should check the record.

Mr. Raynsford: In a moment I shall refer the right hon. Gentleman to the record, which will compound his discomfort. He has revealed that he does not understand the system. It does not matter that the particular site against the background of which he was filmed was not in his constituency; it was in Berkshire. The key decision was that of the previous Conservative Government to direct Berkshire county council to provide additional homes. The right hon. Gentleman did nothing about that, and made no representations.

As and when the right hon. Gentleman eventually stirred himself, no doubt having recovered from the disappointment of his failed leadership bid, he raised the issue with the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal, asking:

> "Does he agree that he should look again at the way in which the five-year supply of land is calculated, and base it more on market experience—the number of houses people want to build and can sell"?—[*Official Report*, 17 October 1995; Vol. 264, c. 155.]

That was the view he took then; he did not want to save greenfield sites and was a free marketeer. His whole case has collapsed because his record has been revealed as fundamentally in conflict with everything he has said this afternoon. Of course, the right hon. Gentleman is not renowned for consistency or principle. He is reduced to promoting short-termism without responsibility and pandering to the populist views characteristic of an Opposition who will say anything to get votes today and deny homes tomorrow.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): On the matter of homes in Berkshire, the right hon. Gentleman says that he was very concerned to emphasise that those houses should not be built in his constituency, but in Slough. May I inform my hon. Friend the Minister of the relative population densities of Slough and Wokingham? In Slough, there are more than 4,100 people per square kilometre. There is almost no land left. The Crow report has worrying implications for my constituency. We must try to ensure that we do not have a system in which, because of the unitary authorities in Berkshire area, an attempt is made to press all that development into Slough. The only land

[Fiona Mactaggart]

it has left is green belt. I would be reassured if the real problems in Slough, which, under the previous Conservative Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The Minister has been extremely generous with interventions, but they should not extend to mini speeches.

Mr. Raynsford: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend raises a perfectly valid point about the procedure involved in considering the Serplan proposals and the panel inquiry report. I shall deal with that in my speech.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I undertook to give way and I shall do so in a moment, but I must first make progress.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham made a number of references to the panel report into the regional planning guidance for the south-east. He seeks to confuse everyone about both the facts and the process. Contrary to the impression conveyed by the Opposition, the various figures for new housing in the south-east, which are under discussion, are not the Government's figures, and they are not additional to those put forward previously. Indeed, they subsume the existing figures in the current regional planning guidance, which was issued by the previous Government. To talk in terms of five cities the size of Southampton is nonsense rather than common sense.

The draft regional planning guidance was prepared by the local authorities in the south-east acting together. They suggested that some 700,000 new dwellings—about three and a half Southamptons—should be provided over the period 1996-2016. That draft RPG was considered at a public examination, held over six weeks in spring by an independent panel. A large amount of evidence was presented by local authorities, conservation interests, business organisations and others in an open and transparent process. The independent panel report, published on 8 October, reflects the panel's findings on the evidence presented. Among other things, it proposed that any development in the south-east over the next 20 years should be done in a co-ordinated way, as in "Priority Areas for Economic Regeneration" and in areas where development is needed, such as the Thames gateway, rather than in an unco-ordinated, unsustainable, piecemeal way spread across the region.

I shall not say tonight what the Government's response will be to the panel's report. As with all such planning matters, the Secretary of State will have to consider carefully what the panel has had to say and all the evidence presented before he makes up his mind. Under the new more open procedures, the Government will in due course publish proposed changes to the draft RPG for further consultation, and I hope that that will happen early in the new year. It would be wrong of me to speculate now on what the Secretary of State may decide in this case. However, we shall consider what the panel has said within the context of our stated policies of promoting sustainable development and an urban renaissance, and our clearly stated policy that 60 per cent. of all new development should be on brownfield sites.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): May I bring the Minister back to the way in which the policy operates now, and take him away from the south-east towards the south-west and Somerset? I have in my hand some structure plan review modifications, which I received today. When he considers the final result of that review, will the Secretary of State take into account the most up-to-date figures and the latest planning advice, or will he consider the matters that were considered by the examination-in-public panel? That makes an enormous difference to the conclusions reached by the local authorities and, I hope, by the Secretary of State in reducing housing numbers in Somerset.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. He will know from my response to an earlier question from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) that the process of changing from the old system to the new one is incremental. One cannot throw out the position that one has reached, so one cannot reject the conclusions of the examination in public, but gradually the new arrangements are added. The new PPG 3 comes into the equation as and when it is published. It will therefore be open to the local authority to consider the need in the south-west in the context of the previous structure plan proposals and the emerging Government guidance.

Mr. Tom King: As the Minister will have noticed, I sought to intervene when I thought that the whole debate was going to degenerate into the scoring of cheap party political points against my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). I do not believe that the Minister honestly does not recognise the real concerns throughout the country about the development of the policy. If I may take the south-east—the south-west has the same problem—it is not just a question of 1.1 million more houses and that is the end of it. It is 1.1 million until the end of 2016 and then, as far as people know, it will be the same all over again. The policy is unsustainable. Two thirds of the rise in the population in Somerset is due to inward migration from the north and other places by people wishing to take advantage of better job opportunities and other factors. That is causing urban deprivation, inner-city disaster and rural sprawl, and it is a major challenge for the whole country.

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong in assuming that migration from the north is the major factor in population and housing growth in the south-west or the south-east. It is not, and if he studies the figures he will realise that.

Mr. King: It is the major factor.

Mr. Raynsford: No, it is not. I am sorry, but he is wrong.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: However, there are pressures to deal with household growth, much of which is generated by the need to accommodate new indigenous households.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the Minister, but the hon. Member for Reigate

(Mr. Blunt) cannot stay on his feet while the Minister is speaking if the Minister has not given way, which he has not.

Mr. Raynsford: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am trying to respond to the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), and the hon. Member for Reigate should wait at least until I have answered that intervention. The hon. Gentleman has intervened twice, so he has already had more than his fair share of interventions.

The point that I was making to the right hon. Member for Bridgwater was that difficult issues must be addressed. The undesirable consequences of inadequate provision are rising house prices, homelessness and overcrowding. We must make provision, but it must be sustainable if we are to ensure that we do not bequeath communities that cannot continue to exist without putting unreasonable pressures on the countryside. That is our objective and our policy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: It is important that I now focus on the proposals on which we have been working to ensure that any future development in England is sustainable and appropriate. Our agenda goes far wider than just planning policy, although that is a major plank of the overall strategy. Our approach includes the urban and rural White Papers, which we intend to publish next year, the regional planning agenda, which is already in place, the work of the regional development agencies to help to solve regional economic imbalances, and many other cross-government initiatives.

In addition, we are trying, through the social exclusion agenda, to balance out the differences between regions, towns and cities as regards the lot of different members of the community. We are trying to iron out the differences between the haves and have-nots, which was so chronically exacerbated during the time of the previous Government.

We also believe that we have a responsibility to people in need of affordable housing. Unlike some local authorities—and the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who did not mention the need for affordable housing—we believe that we should ensure that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home. We do not believe, like some people, that their needs can be ignored. The sons and daughters of existing residents need housing, and we should plan to include them.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: Our approach was set out in our White Paper "Planning for the Communities of the Future" and in the draft planning policy guidance note on housing, PPG3. The whole approach has been widely endorsed by the all-party Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, the urban task force and by far the majority of the respondents to the PPG3 consultation.

The Government believe that everyone should have the opportunity of a decent home. That will mean looking ahead for up to 20 years to assess housing needs, tempered by constraints on capacity, to arrive at a responsible and realistic view of the future housing requirements of a region.

Mr. Paterson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I shall not give way.

We should plan to meet the requirements of the whole community, including those in need of affordable housing. We should provide greater choice and a better mix in the size, type and location of housing. We should provide sufficient homes, but give priority to the re-use of previously developed land, bringing empty homes into use and promoting the conversion of existing buildings within urban areas, in preference to greenfield sites. As I have already stressed, we are committed to our national target of 60 per cent. of new homes on previously developed land or through conversions.

Mr. Paterson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I shall not give way. I have made it perfectly clear that I have taken enough interventions, and it is time to move on, as other hon. Members want to contribute to the debate.

We will look very critically at the panel report on the south-east, which proposes a 50 per cent. target for brownfield development. We should create more sustainable patterns of development by building in ways that will deliver accessibility by public transport to jobs, education and health facilities, shopping, leisure and local services.

We propose a systematic approach to assessing the potential of land for housing. We should release land reserved for employment or other uses that might better be used for housing. We should review planning policies and standards that affect the capacity to accommodate development, especially those relating to the layout, density and car parking requirements in new developments. We should promote good design in new housing developments to create attractive, high-quality living environments where people will choose to live. This is a one-nation approach which aims to plan ahead; faces up to the scale of the challenge and the difficult decisions that confront us; does not shirk responsibility; and recognises the importance of reconciling different and sometimes conflicting priorities.

As the House knows, we are strongly committed to maximising the re-use of previously developed land and buildings, particularly in urban areas.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Raynsford: I will give way for the last time.

Mr. Bruce: The Minister knows that one of the ch[illegible] that the Government made when they came to po[illegible] was to move more planning, or regeneration, decisions to the rural development authority. Will he consider what has happened to the fourth of the four sets of sites on Portland? The first three have all been redeveloped for housing and business purposes, because they were sold to the private sector; the fourth is in the hands of the rural development authority, and has been

[Mr. Bruce]

for two years. The authority refuses to return calls from people who want to create jobs in my constituency. The policy is not working, and I should be grateful if the Minister would look into the matter. A massive brownfield site is available, and we want to start developing it.

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman will write to me, I shall undertake to look into the issue that he has raised. I am happy to ensure that he receives a detailed response.

We are insisting on regional and local targets. We launched the national land use database; until we commissioned it, there was no available evidence of what previously developed land was likely to become available. That was a crucial step towards ensuring that we had the information that was necessary if we were to achieve our brownfield site targets. The right hon. Member for Wokingham and his colleagues simply had not thought it worth checking their data. We are now setting up rigorous capacity studies, and proposing annual monitoring.

The Tories had 18 years in which to face up to the challenge, and they failed. No sooner had they been converted from being laissez-faire free marketeers hellbent on dismantling the planning system to being aware of the need to plan ahead than they renounced that awareness and became "NIMBYs" without responsibility.

We know what is realistic and do-able. We know what we have achieved from our annual land use change statistics. For the first time, we have information on what previously developed land is available, has planning permission and is scheduled for development in local plans, and what could become available for development in the next five years. The urban task force chaired by Lord Rogers has suggested that the 60 per cent. target will be challenging in the longer term—

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I will, because I know that the hon. Gentleman has taken a long-term interest in the subject; but this is the last intervention that I will take.

Mr. Steen: I am grateful to the Minister. He has been very charitable, but I am sure that he will be helped by my question.

I do not know how exactly how many, but an enormous number—millions and millions—of houses were to be built, but the Deputy Prime Minister has reduced that figure of 400 million, or whatever it was, to 3.8 million. Will that feed into the regional plans and the district plans? Will we benefit from the reduction that the Deputy Prime Minister wishes to incorporate in the national figure? If the reduction does take place, when will it take place?

Mr. Raynsford: I shall be charitable to the hon. Gentleman, as he is clearly having difficulty with his figures. I assure him—and he will know from the frequent debates in which we have engaged in the Chamber—that we are introducing the new arrangements that he himself agrees are an improvement on the previous arrangement. I do not claim that he agrees with everything that we are doing, but he has told me that he feels that draft planning policy guidance note 3 goes very much in the right direction. As I said in response to two earlier interventions, we are committed to the incremental implementation of the new arrangements to ensure that we achieve the objectives that I have spelt out.

In PPG3, we propose to promote the national target of 60 per cent. of development on brownfield sites by ensuring that regional planning bodies adopt challenging regional targets, based on a full assessment of achievement to date, regional capacity studies and proposed local targets based on local plans and the national land use database. We also propose that local planning authorities should review the capacity of their areas, having assessed the impact of changing policies on density, parking and layout.

We are promoting greater choice in the mix of size, type and location of housing, offering more choice for small households, for whom the house builder's standard product—a four-bedroom house on a greenfield site at low density—is not the preferred option. We are creating attractive alternatives, making urban living a real choice, rather than a compromise for those who have choice. Above all, we are firmly weighting the selection criteria for assessing the development potential of possible housing sites in favour of the re-use of previously developed land in the right locations.

I assure the House that we are committed to maximising the re-use of land and buildings, the so-called brownfield option, and to making better use of existing land and buildings to minimise the need to use greenfield sites. That will mean reassessing density standards, particularly in the south-east, which has the lowest densities for new housing developments in the whole country.

We are choosing the most sustainable greenfield options through the systematic assessment of sites to be allocated for housing in development plans. That will mean revisiting existing allocations to review their suitability and capacity. We are getting a better mix of types, sizes and locations for the additional housing, so as to offer greater choice.

Unlike the Opposition, we are prepared to face up to our responsibilities to the present and next generation who need housing.We have a realistic strategy to meet the challenge. Labour is the party of one-nation politics, the Conservatives of short-term opportunism and long-term amnesia.

The Conservatives' record in government was lamentable. Their cover-up is unconvincing. Their rhetoric is hollow. Their policies are threadbare. Their motion deserves to be overwhelmingly rejected.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): May I take the opportunity to remind the House that the 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches applies from now?

4.52 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South–West Norfolk): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on introducing what is an

important subject for debate in the House. It is, indeed, about the balance between urban and rural communities. The common-sense policies that he has formulated will go some way to countering the imbalance that the Government's policies are fast achieving.

The Government's view of what they have achieved since they came into office is trumpeted in the Order Paper. They claim that their

"planning, housing, transport, countryside protection, welfare and economic policies will achieve more sustainable and equitable patterns of both urban and rural development."

The Minister has described their policies as having one-nation appeal.

The Government came to office promising policies that were based on consensus and inclusion, yet in two and a half years they have created two Britains: one urban and one rural; they have switched funds from shire to urban areas; they have largely ignored the worst crisis in farming since the 1930s; and they have imposed the highest transport fuel taxes in Europe, apparently not knowing that those impact more severely on the rural economy, which is already reeling from the rest of their policies.

The Government are undermining local democracy by switching power from elected councils to appointed regional quangos. The planning decisions that they have already taken show that their solution to the two Britains that they are heedlessly creating is suburban sprawl, uniting the whole country against that threat. Those policies demonstrate clearly their disregard for and ignorance of the rural areas on which they are imposing those developments, not that other examples are hard to find.

The Government cannot be unaware of the extra costs of delivering services in rural areas. I say that not because they give any sign of having understood it, but because of the number of reports that they have commissioned telling them so. Their independent consultants have pointed out that it costs more to police rural areas, which is self-evident to all who live in them.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Shephard: No. I will not take any interventions because of the time limit.

The result in West Norfolk police division, an area the size of Bedfordshire, is that there are 32 police officers on duty at any one time, when the force is up to strength, which it currently is not, yet Norfolk has lost 50 police officers since May 1997.

A report on population sparsity and social services published in August 1998, by the County Councils Network, concluded that the costs and time of travel are higher in rural areas than in urban areas; there are additional transport costs in providing services in rural areas; and economies of scale are harder to achieve. Those factors apply across a wide range of local authority services, with the consequence that rural authorities face considerable difficulties in providing the same range and standard of services at the same cost as in urban areas.

Council tax in rural areas represents a higher proportion of local average earnings. Therefore, people in rural areas pay relatively more in council tax than their urban counterparts. Yet, the Government have changed the funding formula so that, over the life of this Parliament, rural areas stand to lose more than £500 million in council grant.

The Government's attitude to agriculture—which has contributed to the worst crisis in farming since the 1930s—has meant a drop in farming incomes of more than half since they were elected. The Government's own failure to lift the ban on beef on the bone has left them with little credibility when arguing with the French, and now with the Germans, that British beef is safe. The Government have hit other farmers, in both livestock and arable sectors, with taxes and regulations.

I have no doubt that the Government's focus groups tell them that, as there are only 400,000 farmers in Britain, they are an insignificant group and not particularly popular—so they can be safely ignored. The Government's policies show that they have never understood that a prosperous agriculture sector enables a prosperous rural economy—it is as simple as that. As farmers go out of business, so will agricultural engineers, seed merchants, garages, markets, agricultural suppliers and the service industries that support them.

The Government, in the name of protecting the environment—the Order Paper shows so clearly that they have not understood what they have done—have also blithely imposed on the United Kingdom the highest fuel taxes in Europe. As Ministers' thinking—hence, their planning decisions—is urban, they have no concept of the impact that those costs have on people in rural areas. In my constituency, it is not unusual for families to have to have two or even three cars per household simply to get to work. Visiting the general practitioner's surgery may involve a round-trip of 14 or 15 miles; the local hospital, 30 miles; and the council office, jobs centre, benefits office and citizens advice bureau, another 30 miles.

Although the Government's announcement of a rural bus grant was welcome, not only can the grant not begin to compensate rural people for the fuel tax burdens that the Government have imposed on them, but Ministers really do have to understand that a bus network cannot cover the complexities of modern rural life and that many people, simply to lead their lives, need to use cars. That would be true even if the bus grant had been sensibly introduced. However, I should like to spend a moment sharing with the House the way in which the scheme is being implemented in south-west Norfolk. I shall make the point on rural buses in some detail, because the transport issue is key to all of the planning decisions already announced by the Government.

The secretary of the Watton and District chamber of commerce, Mr. Martin Anscombe, has written to the director of transportation at Norfolk county council about rural transport funding, stating:

"I have now been tasked by this Chamber's Committee to express the views of members"—

on the rural bus grant—

"in the strongest possible terms. That is, simply, that the provision . . . as far as Watton is concerned, is a complete waste of public money . . .

There are now some 130 additional buses per week through Watton . . .

Informal observations indicate that the new services are, so far, very little used, with large, single-decker coaches arriving and departing . . . empty or nearly so.

[Mrs. Shephard]

The effect of the grant has been the setting up of new services on a somewhat scatter-gun approach, with no time for consultation or a thorough examination of either need or effect."

That is not the only problem.

Earlier this year, my constituent Mr. Bagge, of Stradsett, wrote to the local council, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, stating:

"We have received correspondence from you with regard to various Bus Pass Schemes which we have passed on to people living in the village of Stradsett and pinned up on our Church noticeboard.

We would just like to know exactly where the Bus Stop sign is"—

some booklets stated that it was in one location, but others said it was somewhere else—

"please let us know where the bus stop is".

The reply came from the council two months later:

"I apologise for the delay in replying to your letter but it has taken me some time to identify who exactly is responsible for the location of the bus stops.

From a site visit that I made to the village I would agree that it is not very clear where any bus stops are located, but from an examination of the timetables I have marked on the enclosed map where I think the buses should probably be stopping."

Eventually my constituent was contacted by the county council, which said:

"At Stradsett, as in many rural areas, there are no fixed bus stops. Buses will stop on a hail and ride basis. . . . Timetables state a specific location in villages to help indicate the route the bus takes."

Small wonder that, despite their protestations to the contrary, the Government's much-vaunted rural bus grant is not working. Such nonsense can be put right by the common-sense policies advanced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham.

However, there is another, more menacing fundamental change, on which the Government seem set, that is hitting local democracy. To address the democratic deficit that their devolution policies have created in England, they plan to impose artificial and unwelcome regional structures throughout the country that would abolish counties, make local government more remote and, worse still, make it urban dominated. The rural development agencies are showing the way.

We ought to value local democracy and the involvement of local people who are willing to give their time to take decisions closest to the people whom they affect. We should seek to strengthen the local nature of the democratic process. That is why our proposals to give elected local authorities more say in large-scale development and planning matters are so welcome. In the mean time, the Government, from their urban fastness, seek to smother local democracy by layers of quangos—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the right hon. Lady's time is up.

5.2 pm

Mrs. Christine Butler (Castle Point): One cannot begin to discuss this subject sensibly without focusing on existing urban areas and cities. It is lamentable that in the central region of London we have only 500,000 residents, compared with 2 million in cities such as Paris. I welcome Government initiatives on planning policy guidance, regional development agencies and regional planning. They are targeting need, deprivation, health, education and housing. There are 750,000 empty properties in urban areas, and that problem needs to be addressed.

What are the causes? The first is the prevailing ideology of the past that was linked to market forces regardless of the environmental, social or economic consequences. Thoughtlessness and a willingness to pander to vested interests led to piecemeal planning that resulted in rundown areas in cities and conurbations standing cheek by jowl with up-market, expensive housing. That is true not just of the south-east, but of northern and midland areas. In some of those areas it is hardly possible to buy a house for less than £100,000, yet a quarter of a mile away they are practically being given away.

The potential of previously developed land has often been disregarded. The problems were made worse by the old predict and provide system that encouraged development on greenfield sites as an easy way out. Local planning authorities have often been unable to withstand applications for greenfield site development; they can only temper the situation by section 106 agreements. That has been uncomfortable for many districts who have had applications for large developments of hundreds—sometimes thousands—of homes and have had to negotiate a section 106 agreement for schools and roads. All that has added to the existing problems without any real focus on a sequential test, which will now be introduced. I am pleased that local authorities will be able to apply that sequential test and discuss need to a greater extent than ever before.

Authorities will be able to expect better design principles. We have always paid regard to design, but not nearly enough. I welcome the urban task force report, under Lord Rogers, that has put design at the top of the agenda. Without really good design, nothing can work. Local authorities should be able to describe they types of housing needed and local planning authorities should have development briefs for parcels of land. They should be able to scrutinise and criticise design, and to expect higher standards.

I would argue for changes to punitive VAT rates on conversions and against the present zero rate on new build. That cannot go on. There are problems, but the Government must look closely at what they can do to militate against the over-willingness of developers who want greenfield site development.

Empty property should not attract concessions—it should attract penalties. At present, local authorities can allow reductions in rates demands and so on for an empty property, but we should introduce penalties. I am not certain of the rate—that is up to the Government—but the penalties should be substantial, so that we can get empty properties into use. Often, housing associations are ready and willing to buy up those properties and convert them for social housing, which would benefit the sons and daughters of people living in those areas.

We must look to the development of the five regions in England. For the life of me, I cannot understand the Opposition's destructive attitude towards regionalism. If they support local interests, why do they want everything to depend on Whitehall? Why will they not give significance and credit to people living within the regions, or allow them to determine their own futures—to know, for instance, what skills are needed so that they can match

education, skills and new industry? Why will the Opposition not accept that that is a good way forward? That is what we intend to do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Butler: I will not give way, as I have only a few minutes.

It is far more desirable for regional planning guidance and regional development agencies to come to some broad conclusions on spatial development, such as where best to locate employment and housing. These should be close together, and we must have no more of the 30 to 40-mile journey to work. We cannot get rid of that situation over night, and we are depending on new Government initiatives to tackle these problems. At the moment, these are mostly in draft form and will take time. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) may not agree, but he should remember that it takes years to establish section 106 agreements. The new way forward would help, and we would not have to go through all those long and involved planning applications, or try to resolve matters through complicated section 106 and other unhelpful legal agreements. We could get on with considering Lord Rogers's task force's report, and all the new initiatives for creating regeneration on brownfield sites.

I do not want to take up too much of the time of the House, because I realise that many Members are keen to contribute to the debate. However, I want to stress the fact that the best way forward involves integrated policies, which should derive from local needs and be delivered through a regional approach, instead of the old predict and provide system, with its over-reliance on remote Whitehall decisions.

5.11 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): We welcome this debate on the crucial issue of how we respond to the challenge of housing the growing number of households that it is predicted will be formed over the next few years. The subject is important, and we must get our answers right for the sake of the hundreds of thousands of inadequately housed families in this country and for the future of our precious green spaces.

To understand the consequences of getting the matter wrong, we need look no further than the record of the previous Government. With that in mind, I draw the attention of the House to the amendment tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself. We welcome the Conservatives' new-found conversion to environmentalism and the protection of green fields in the south-east, but we question whether their concern may be due to the fact that the south-east is where almost all their seats are held. We cannot let them get away with ignoring their record of 18 years of neglect of those green places.

The Tory legacy is one of

"a growing divide between the prosperous and deprived areas of Britain".

That is the situation that the Labour Government found when they took office in 1997. They have been slow and unadventurous in dealing with it, but we should make no mistake about the fact that it was the Tories who put this country in that situation.

The previous Government's predict and provide policy resulted in record numbers of homeless and inadequately housed people. Only 42 per cent. of the new houses built were sited on brownfield land, which means that six out of 10 new homes were built on greenfield sites. That Government's sale of council houses without replacement reduced the availability of affordable housing for rent—which was a significant factor in bringing about the present situation—with record numbers of people unable to obtain such housing.

The Labour party promised a change of policy, saying that there would be an end to predict and provide and that the new housing requirement would be reduced from 4.4 million to 3.8 million homes. Labour also promised that there would be a new commitment to urban regeneration. We have heard plenty of fine words, but we have not yet seen much change on the ground. Too many greenfield sites are still being built on, and the urban task force estimated in its report that at the current rate of progress, the Government would not meet their 60 per cent. target for development on brownfield sites, but would achieve only 55 per cent.

Liberal Democrats believe that we need to work much harder to use the existing housing infrastructure. Our aim is environmental sustainability, and our target is for 75 per cent. of development to take place on brownfield sites.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The hon. Gentleman clearly feels on safe ground attacking the only two parties that have ever been in power or are ever likely to be in power. However, two exceptions to that rule are district councils and county councils, many of which have been controlled by the Liberal Democrats. He has only to consider North Wiltshire council, or Wiltshire county council, which used to be Liberal Democrat-controlled, to see what happens when his party is in power. Its councillors give planning permission for out-of-town shopping centres and housing all over our beautiful greenfield sites.

Mr. Sanders: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the system. Local authorities have to work within a national framework that sets a national target. They are duty bound to identify sites; they have no choice in the matter. That is true of Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat councils.

We should levy a greenfield tax.

Mr. Steen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sanders: I shall certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is my constituency neighbour.

Mr. Steen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy and kindness. Our constituencies share Torbay, although he has a little more of it than I do.

The hon. Gentleman is after a figure of 70 per cent. for brownfield sites—I do not disagree with him on that. However, in Torbay the problem is that brownfield sites do not reach a figure of 70 per cent.—at present, the figure is not even 30 per cent. In view of that, where does the hon. Gentleman propose to put the houses?—not in the South Hams, the other part of my constituency.

Mr. Sanders: The target is a national one; we should not expect every local authority to reach that figure. The

[Mr. Sanders]

hon. Gentleman should be better informed about Torbay, because it has a higher percentage of homes on brownfield sites than any other local authority in the whole of the far south-west. Torbay should be congratulated for having achieved that.

We would levy a greenfield development tax to bring closer the relative costs of greenfield and brownfield development. Will the Minister consider that proposal? We need a strict hierarchy whereby empty housing is restored to use, redundant buildings are converted into homes, more flats are built over shops and existing infrastructure is exhausted before new greenfield sites are considered.

Top-down solutions have proven ineffective. Global figures set by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are not helpful. We would place a duty on local authorities to assess local housing needs in partnership with developers, social housing providers and private landlords. Their findings, together with those of all local authorities, would be combined regionally in order strategically to plan future housing growth. I am sure that the hon. Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) would warm to that idea, because it meets her criterion of the greater involvement of people in decisions that affect their lives.

We would also take a firm line on second homes. In areas where they are concentrated, they inflate prices beyond the ability of local people to pay, they threaten local shops and services and they reduce the income of local councils. We would allow councils to remove the council tax rebate on second homes and, in areas where the ownership of such homes is squeezing out local home buyers and causing other social and economic problems, we would permit councils to introduce a premium of up to 100 per cent. on the council tax, or a flat-rate tax on second homes. Again, I think that the hon. Member for Castle Point will warm to that idea.

The revenue would be kept in the local area to subsidise bus routes, village schools and other services threatened by a part-time population. We would also allow councils to require change of use planning consent for the transfer of a full-time residence to be used as a second home.

Mr. Steen: Would the hon. Gentleman ban second homes?

Mr. Sanders: We would not ban them, but we would not reward them as the current system does.

More needs to be done to bring existing houses back into use. We would strengthen compulsory purchase powers for local authorities on properties left empty without reasonable cause for more than 12 months, changing the restrictions on data use so that housing departments can access council tax and revenue department data in the same authority, to identify owners of empty properties.

We would also restore mandatory improvement grants to unfit houses. Such grants would be subject to the property remaining in tenanted occupation for at least three years after the award of the grant. I should like to hear the Minister's views on that proposal, and on our proposal to end the anomaly whereby VAT is levied on renovation and repair, but not on new build.

The debate should be about meeting housing need; that is just as important in the north as it is in the south-east—it is important everywhere. If an excessive number of houses is built in the south, that will attract more people to move south to take up surplus jobs, thus further exacerbating the decline of our urban centres. We need to consider ways of encouraging work and prosperity to move to areas with an existing infrastructure that has already been paid for. That means tackling urban renewal head-on, and not merely filing the work of the eminent Lord Rogers and his urban task force to gather dust on a shelf, while the trend away from urban living continues unabated.

Without a creative and determined approach to revitalising urban centres throughout our country—not only those in the north—the south-east will find it increasingly difficult to protect its remaining green spaces. Work needs to be done to manage the expectations of the growing number of small households, because it simply is not possible for everyone to own a three or four-bedroomed detached house with a double garage. Pilot projects must be developed to demonstrate that higher density living can be an attractive alternative for both home owners and those in various forms of social housing tenure.

The Liberal Democrats believe that we should focus on and speak up for those who do not have a decent home and could never afford to buy one. It is essential that the House and the country at large realise the great social cost of failing those people. The impact on people's lives of inadequate housing ranges from family breakdown to impaired educational achievement of children living in that housing. Mental and physical health can be affected and poor general health is often a result. That costs the state a great deal, not only in wasted talent, but in strict financial terms: it has been estimated that the costs of ill health resulting from poor housing put £2 billion on the national health service bill.

We are now 2,000 years from no room at the inn. I hope that the House will ensure that, just before we enter the 21st century, there is room at the inn for the thousands who regularly sleep rough or suffer the misery of inadequate housing. That should be central to today's debate. Despite the Conservatives' cheek in tabling the motion, the Liberal Democrats will support it because the Government have so far failed to respond adequately to the concerns expressed in it and to those that I have outlined in my speech.

5.22 pm

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Even after two years as a Member of Parliament, I am staggered by the effrontery of the Conservative case set out in the motion, especially the crocodile tears shed over

"the growing divide between the prosperous and deprived areas of Britain . . . the run-down of industry and the dereliction of inner city and old industrial areas".

It was the Conservative Government under Mrs. Thatcher who were largely responsible for those ills.

The motion ludicrously suggests that people are being

"encouraged to move out of the urban areas into new housing on greenfield sites".

The Conservatives know perfectly well that the Labour Government have set a 60 per cent. target for new homes built on recycled land, released extra single regeneration

budget funds for urban renewal and invested in education action zones and housing action zones, precisely to improve the quality of life of city dwellers and to encourage more people to stay in or move into cities. The Government are also encouraging local authorities to control the traffic in urban residential streets through the creation of home zones, so that families are encouraged to stay in cities by the feeling that they are safe there.

I am sorry that most Conservative Members who represent the south-east stayed in the Chamber only to barrack my hon Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and have since found better things to do. As a Labour Member of Parliament representing the south-east, I shall explore the impact of Conservative policies on the south-east. I totally reject the notion that the south-east needs no further growth and that no homes are needed for the region's young people. Of course, I would say that as one who represents a city with the highest proportion of young people in the whole of the UK.

I also reject the notion that, if no development is allowed in the south-east, the jobs being created in that region will go to other regions. It is not a question of north versus south, but one of north and south. The south-east is the most affluent region of the United Kingdom, but in European terms it is not especially affluent and there is huge scope for further economic growth. In any case, as Labour Members representing south-east constituencies know, not everyone in the south-east shares in the region's general affluence.

I strongly support Labour's strategy on regional development agencies, because it will ensure that there is appropriate economic development tailored to the strengths of every region. The south-east needs an RDA to deal with its problems, including pockets of disadvantage, incredible congestion—the result of an inadequate public transport infrastructure inherited from the previous Government—and skills shortages: the south-east contains a significant number of people who are, in effect, unemployable despite there being jobs to spare, because they lack the skills necessary to take up the vacancies. It is incredible that the Opposition wish to abolish RDAs and the new deal for the unemployed, which is especially important in constituencies such as mine in helping those who are currently excluded from sharing in economic prosperity to participate in a dynamic local economy.

I want to argue for planned development as opposed to the laissez-faire Conservative policies of the past, and the NIMBY-ism writ large in the Opposition's current proposals. I will use my city, Milton Keynes, to argue that case. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) left the Chamber after taking it upon himself to speak for all Buckinghamshire Members of Parliament. I presume that he forgot to consult two of us before speaking on our behalf.

Milton Keynes is an incredibly successful example of the planned environment. It has grown from a city housing 40,000 people in 1967 to one that is home to 207,000 people. Its ultimate population is meant to be 250,000, and that figure should be reached in the next four or five years. Milton Keynes is successful because individual neighbourhoods are superbly landscaped. The landscaping includes rivers, lakes, which have been created to improve the environment, green walkways, cycle ways and parks. It is reminiscent of the work of Capability Brown, but a modern Capability Brown for the people, not for the aristocracy. It incorporates many historic monuments and mediaeval churches in such a way that they complement and enhance the environment of the people who live in that modern city.

Milton Keynes is especially successful because its housing was built in tandem with other necessary facilities such as schools, shops and community centres. That is different from other housing developments such as the huge early example in Reading, where housing was developed with no thought for the other facilities that people needed. That had lamentable consequences for the residents, who might have had nice, affordable houses, but lacked the necessary support structures.

As well as the physical structures of Milton Keynes, a proper community workers' system was established there. Every family who moved to Milton Keynes received a welcome pack, which gave information about the available facilities and offered help with contacting local GPs and other services.

Our city is amazingly successful. Its diverse economy is based on a range of industries and many headquarters of British and overseas firms are situated there. The industries include engineering, distribution, food processing, information technology and design firms. Successful inward investment from the European Union and the far east has been made in Milton Keynes. For example, 10 per cent. of all Taiwanese investment in the United Kingdom is in Milton Keynes and contributes to our employment base.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) has gone on record as saying that he would not like his constituency to resemble Milton Keynes. In the past month, the city's new regional theatre opened. It is a superb theatre, which I invite him to visit with his constituents at his expense. This week, the theatre is hosting the Glyndebourne festival.

Our wonderful art gallery is currently hosting a Gilbert and George exhibition. It is the only UK art gallery where one can see that exhibition, which will travel to the United States. The next time that the hon. Member for Ashford compares my constituency unfavourably with his, he should ensure that his constituents know that he is saying that he does not want them to have a nice art gallery or theatre, or a thriving economy.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): When I said that I would not like my constituency to resemble that of the hon. Lady, I meant that my constituency contains large areas of countryside, which the Crow report would concrete over. Will the hon. Lady reject the Crow report? I hope that she will.

Dr. Starkey: I want to say that Milton Keynes has been an incredible success and that it has given a much better quality of life to those who have moved to it. It was built on a greenfield site, but on low-quality agricultural land. Milton Keynes has many more trees and animals than there were on that low-grade agricultural land.

People in Milton Keynes want their children to be able to live and work in their city. There is already a shortage of affordable housing and, because of the strength of the local economy, substantial in-commuting takes place and that is beginning to cause pollution and congestion.

I welcome that part of Professor Crow's report that relates to Milton Keynes. In particular, I welcome his proposals that state clearly that the eastern side of Milton

[Dr. Starkey]

Keynes needs plan-led growth. Such growth would retain the high quality that Milton Keynes has come to expect, would be linked to sustainable public transport and would provide a balanced community that included more affordable housing. That positive way forward contrasts hugely with the inchoate rants that we heard from Conservative Members.

5.31 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): In contrast to the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South–West (Dr. Starkey), I want to congratulate my right hon. Friends the Members for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and for South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) on their contributions to the debate. I also wish to congratulate the Minister for Housing and Planning on his promotion. I fully recognise his deep experience and expertise in housing and planning matters. I wish him well in his new responsibilities.

I agreed with the hon. Members for Milton Keynes, South–West and for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) when they stressed the importance of the quality of the landscapes around housing and the quality of the housing itself. I therefore congratulate the Government on their choice of Mr. Stuart Lipton as the chairman of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, which will take over the responsibilities of the former Royal Fine Arts Commission and, I hope, will consider how to encourage design in housing at a more parochial level.

I hope to make three constructive points in the debate about greenfield and brownfield site developments. We are in danger of getting bogged down in a competition as to who can promise the most housing development on brownfield sites. Figures of 42 per cent., 50 per cent., 60 per cent. and two thirds have been mentioned, and I understand that the Liberal Democrats now say that three quarters of developments should be on brownfield sites. The figures will vary in different regions of the country, but the important thing is to ensure that we have a policy of not releasing greenfield sites for development until all brownfield sites that can practically be developed are developed.

Therefore, we must consider development on under-used, unused and derelict brownfield sites. It is not unreasonable for the Secretary of State to insist that each local planning authority develops all available brownfield sites before it allows developers to build in the countryside. Only when the Secretary of State is satisfied that that has been done should he allow greenfield sites to be developed. He can control such matters, because he can use his call-in powers. It may sound simplistic—perhaps it is not a bad thing to have an easily expressed policy—but the Government's policy should simply be to encourage brownfield development wherever possible, to allow development sparingly on greenfield sites and never to build on greenbelt land.

If I have a particular criticism of the Government and the Prime Minister, it relates to the developments that will take place on the greenbelt land to the west of Stevenage and outside Newcastle. It is a shade disingenuous of the Prime Minister to say that the Government have increased the amount of greenbelt land by adding to it undevelopable agriculture land. The whole purpose of a greenbelt policy is not to build on the green belt.

Mr. Steen: On this business of sequential development under planning policy guidance note 3 on brownfield and greenfield sites, does my hon. Friend agree that planning policy guidance would be even more helpful it if allowed local authorities to cross boundaries, so that rural authorities could meet their brownfield requirement in the urban area next door?

Sir Sydney Chapman: That is a fair suggestion; it is a matter for consideration, and will vary from one part of the country to the other.

Secondly, having said that we must encourage brownfield development, how can it be done? I shall make two suggestions, which I hope are constructive. The first relates to section 106 agreements. It may be prudent to declare that I am a non-practising architect and a non-practising town and country planning consultant. In fact, I have not practised for many years and have been completely unremunerated for even longer. Section 106 agreements are the section 52 agreements of yesteryear.

I am very uneasy about 106 agreements because, at best, they build in taxation: they stipulate that one may build on one site only if more money is put towards another project elsewhere. Given that, these days, we must be very careful to ensure open government and transparent decisions, I am deeply concerned about many 106 agreements. I would far rather there be an open taxation system, under which, in return for—one hopes—exceptional development on greenfield sites, a tax would help subsidise the cleaning up or decontamination of many brownfield sites. I ask the Government seriously to consider that proposal.

My third point—and my second suggestion—refers to something that the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) has already mentioned. There is a good taxation adage, which goes like this: "If you make an exception for any tax, you create an anomaly." Nowhere is that more true than for value added tax in the construction industry.

The House will know that new dwellings are zero-rated, but that repair, renovation and refurbishment are rated at 17.5 per cent. There has been a trend in London, although I cannot speak for other areas of the country—the Minister may be totally conversant with it, and say that the trend is coming to an end, but I do not think that it is—for converting warehouses and offices to dwellings. In such cases, developers—whether public or private sector—are playing on an uneven field. I realise that there is a problem, and shall spend the couple of minutes left to me to describe it as I understand it.

My argument is that the refurbishment of empty properties and renovation of houses should be zero-rated, in line with new dwellings. However, I understand that that would fall foul of European Community law. The European Court of Justice ruled in 1988, I think, that the scope of our zero rates was too wide, but it accepted that the construction of all buildings for residential use had always been VAT-free and should therefore continue to be treated as such. I do not want to get into an argument about the European issue, but I believe that to be so.

Nevertheless, VAT on renovation or alteration of housing could be reduced to 5 per cent., but only as

"part of a social policy".

I conclude that that means social housing, not privately owned homes.

I understand that the Government are looking into the matter, and that they believe that unifying rates would help to provide a more level playing field—to use their words. However, they also recognise that other economic and technical issues are involved, including European law. I suggest that the Government sort out that inconsistency and, if necessary, lobby very hard for a change in Brussels. As they boast of wanting to ensure that our country is at the heart of Europe, that will be one of my litmus tests to gauge how successful they are in that campaign.

My simple propositions are, first, that there should be open, transparent, but not prohibitive taxation on any greenbelt development, with back-up powers for the Secretary of State to prevent greenfield development where he believes that brownfield sites could be redeveloped. Secondly, there should be subsidy, or at least tax incentives, to defray the extra costs of building on brownfield sites, to encourage building on such sites, for, in most cases, it is the extra costs that make them uneconomic at present. Finally, there should be a comprehensive review with the purpose of unifying VAT on construction.

5.41 pm

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I thank the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) for his constructive and straightforward contribution—in contrast to those of his colleagues.

I shall speak about the erosion of the green belt and green fields in my constituency. However, first I congratulate the Conservative party on being brave enough to call for the debate, because it really has a great deal to answer for. As I remember, for much of the 18 years of Conservative Government, it seemed to be the prevailing view that manufacturing industry did not count for much, and that the future of wealth creation lay with the service sector. Therefore, the only way to create jobs in the north was for local authorities to make increasing amounts of land available for housing on greenfield or greenbelt sites, enabling developers to build so-called executive houses with four or five bedrooms, garages for two cars, and even the odd swimming pool.

The more beautiful the location, the greater the likelihood of attracting service sector entrepreneurs to get into their BMWs and drive up the M1 to expand their empires and convert the natives in areas that they would otherwise have found inhospitable. That view, and consequent Government pressures, led many local authorities, such as Bradford, to release more land for housing in the rural areas to satisfy the Government's demands, based ostensibly on projected household growth.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions still regards the estimate of 4.4 million new households over the 25 years from 1991 to 2016 as the best that there is. However, the Secretary of State, in last year's policy document "Planning for the Communities of the Future", sets out his commitment to ensuring that 60 per cent. of that growth is on brownfield sites—a move very much in the right direction.

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, in its report "A Brown and Pleasant Land", claims that 39.6 per cent. of the 4.4 million projected new households are expected to be formed in London and the south-east, whereas only 8.8 per cent. are projected for Yorkshire and Humberside. In the same table, based on DETR figures, we learn that the area of derelict land in London and the south-east amounts to only 11.4 per cent. of the national total, whereas the Yorkshire and Humberside region contains 13.8 per cent. Could it be that Bradford was pushed by the previous Government into putting too much greenbelt land and too many greenfield sites into the last unitary development plan?

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and I have exchanged many letters on the subject. I initiated an Adjournment debate last year, and spoke in the debate on the tenth report of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs. My argument, now as then, is that parts of the Bradford UDP should never have been allocated for housing.

The largest proposed site in my constituency, with a possible 1,500 dwellings, is in what is still a very rural and quite beautiful part of the Aire valley. Yorkshire Water cannot as yet say that the main sewer has the capacity to cope with that development and the many other smaller developments in the valley. That suggests that Yorkshire Water was never consulted before the last UDP was drawn up, or that it was and gave unreliable assurances.

The original insistence, agreed by the inspector, that the main access road, including a crossing of the Leeds-Liverpool canal, should be funded by the developers is now becoming increasingly vague.

May I repeat my often-made grouse about outline planning permission given by the UDP inspector for housing at Manor Garth at Addingham in the Wharfe valley and in a field at Leeming, a hamlet above Oxenhope—two of the many attractive rural villages in my constituency? Both Manor Garth and Leeming were changed by the previous Government's inspector from village green space to housing land, in the teeth of opposition by Bradford council and the local communities, for no other reason than that the owners wanted to make money out of the land, which, since allocation for housing, has changed hands several times.

These three aspects of the unitary development plan, which I oppose, were introduced under pressure from the previous Government and approved by their inspector—so much for the Conservative party's commitment to retaining our green and pleasant land. I am saddened that this erosion of the green belt and greenfield sites is to remain in the UDP unchallenged, as though handed down on the proverbial tablets of stone.

Much that is good for urban regeneration is going on in my constituency, mainly through Bradford council's single regeneration budget. Following protracted negotiations, the green light was recently given for the rebuilding and refurbishment of the now near-derelict but once elegant Royal arcade. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions visited us last year and saw other imaginative schemes creating homes in the town centre through the SRB.

[Mrs. Ann Cryer]

I recognise and applaud the fact that the Government are moving away from the predict-and-provide mentality, and that their urban task force has examined ways of finding incentives to move the gaze of developers away from the rich pickings of greenfield sites and towards reclaimed sites. I look forward to the transformation of redundant industrial buildings into apartments, and more living-over-the-shop schemes. If we raise our eyes above the often garish shop windows of our older towns, we find lovely, large Victorian buildings, many unused, whereas in France such town centre assets are put to good use as attractive apartments.

It is good to know that the Government are introducing a regional element into the planning process. I hope that that will stop local authorities competing with one another for developments with their yield of council tax and planning gain, by making yet more greenfield sites available.

With 9,000 empty, mainly older dwellings in the Bradford district, this may be a good time to examine the aggressive selling techniques of developers, which leave the private vendor of an older terraced house at a disadvantage.

Too many assumptions in planning law are in favour of the developer, but the Government are doing much that I applaud in this regard. However, if we are to achieve the much desired 60:40 split, we may have to resort to much more of the carrot and stick through taxation and planning guidelines for developers and local authorities alike.

5.48 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): It is unfortunate that the Minister for Housing and Planning is not present. He has attended all the other debates in which I have spoken over the past year, and I am sorry that he will miss what I shall say, but perhaps he will read it in the morning.

The Labour party spends its time blaming us, and we spend much of our time blaming the Labour party. The only difference between the two sides is that the Labour party is in government and must accept responsibility. Even if we may have contributed to part of the problem, the Government's job now is to deal with it. There is not much point in their complaining that they are running the country now.

I shall deal with three aspects of Government policy: the number of houses that they believe should be built; planning policy guidance note 3; and local plans. There is a household time-bomb waiting to explode. From the time that the world began until 1990, the population grew to 5 billion. Between 1990 and 2050, it will increase by another 5 billion, making 10 billion—5 billion more people in 60 years. However, the problem with housing is not analogous.

In Britain, the population is not increasing, but massive numbers of additional housing units are required, largely because of increased levels of divorce, the fact that elderly people are living longer, and the movement of young people out of the parental household at an earlier age. In the south-west, about a third of the new households requiring housing results from in-migration.

The previous Secretary of State believed that 4.4 million new households were required by 2011. He based that on the famous predict and provide formula. The current Secretary of State, though, has managed to spirit away 600,000 households from that figure—with a magician-like quality, they have disappeared into thin air. The figure is now 3.8 million and I say to the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) that the Government have agreed to it. It is no good the Secretary of State mouthing the right words in Whitehall if his voice does not reach the regions. Although he has spirited away all those households, that has not affected the south-west or the regional planning committee, which insists that 438,000 extra households need to be built in Devon by 2011. Devon county council, which is Liberal Democrat run, is locked into the figure of 90,000 and South Hams district council feels obliged to find land for 12,000 new houses.

Although the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) has taken a little break, it is worth mentioning that the council is expected to build 6,200 new houses. Where will it build them, because it has used up all its brownfield land and there is not much greenfield land? If Torbay's population growth over the past 20 years is projected forward, the indication is that the total population would increase by a factor of only 0.08 per cent., or 983 new dwellings, not the 6,200 quoted under the predict and provide formula.

In March, the Government issued the consultative draft of planning policy guidance note 3, setting out a sequential approach to planning that suggested that local authorities would have the power to prevent greenfield development if they had undeveloped brownfield sites in their area. That was a positive step and I supported it. It seemed even more positive when, during an Adjournment debate on Lord Rogers's report, the Minister stated:

> "PPG is a material consideration already . . . and authorities may have regard to it in considering appropriate planning matters."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1999; Vol. 335, c. 361.]

The problem is that, in practice, local authorities will not put PPG3 into effect until it has legal standing. I asked the Minister when it would be published; he replied that it would be published in the relatively near future. That was nearly four months ago. Indeed, in response to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride), the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes), stated:

> "The final version of PPG3 should be published very shortly."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1999; Vol. 337, c. 8.]

When will PPG3 become law and what is meant by "shortly"?

Let us deal with the sequential approach. The Government say that 60 per cent. of new households should be built on previously developed land. What will happen if, as in Torbay, 60 per cent. of new households cannot be built on brownfield sites? The figure is nearer 30 per cent. What will happen to the other 30 per cent? South Hams contains many categories of land under environmental protection, areas of outstanding natural beauty and landscape value, national park land and conservation areas. What is the council supposed to do if the area does not have enough brownfield sites?

That consideration causes me to raise the question whether PPG3 will allow local authorities in a country area to jump over the boundaries into an urban area where there are spare brownfield sites. The local authority in a country area could provide some of that housing

allocation in the next-door area—in my case, cities such as Plymouth or Exeter, which have a lot of brownfield sites. That proposal would accelerate their use and the Government must take that important point on board. If they are to insist on a sequential approach in a country area, they will have to ban building on greenfield sites until all the brownfield sites are filled. However, there will still be a requirement for more households. We have to consider PPG3 to be more than a list of the Government's favourite options and I believe that the ability to jump over neighbourhood boundaries is an essential requirement if it is to have real meaning. PPG3 may become a lame duck or a white elephant.

Dr. Starkey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steen: Not at the moment, if the hon. Lady does not mind. If I have time, I shall give way later.

Local authorities have either produced their local plans or are about to do so and those are based on the national figure of 4.4 million new households. That is wrong to start with: if the Government are to reduce the figure to 3.8 million, that has to be fed into the local plans now or they will be based on a false figure and more land than necessary will be taken up for household development.

When developers have not received consent to build on a greenfield site because brownfield sites remain undeveloped, will the inspector say, "You cannot have planning permission to develop an estate because you have not finished up the brownfield sites yet"? Can the Minister explain whether it will it be a Government direction that brownfield sites have to be filled first and that development will be allowed on no greenfield sites until then? Will inspectors support that approach on appeal?

How will the Government cope, even with the figure of 3.8 million new households? Will the planning inspectors pay any regard to infrastructure? If we are to have 3.8 million new households, we will need endless new schools, new shops, new leisure centres, new roads and new water and sewerage pipes for them. Will the Government fund that? If they are to rely on the developers to put in the necessary infrastructure, they can do so only if a development is so massive that the developers will be able to make a big enough profit to install all those facilities. I believe that the household time-bomb has not been spirited away by this new approach. On the contrary, it is ticking away merrily and the Government must address it.

5.57 pm

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): I listened to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) open the debate and began to wonder which planet he was on. He clearly inhabits a world very different from that inhabited by most of my constituents. The motion refers to a divided Britain, the dereliction of the inner cities and the need for urban regeneration. I am absolutely stunned that Conservative Members have the cheek to talk about a divided Britain and the problems of the inner cities when the people I represent live with the Tory legacy day after day. There are absolutely horrendous problems in towns and cities across the nation.

Conservative Members do not like to be reminded of what they did, but they presided over the biggest ever increase in the gap between rich and poor in this country, destroyed manufacturing industry in the two biggest recessions we have ever experienced and threw hundreds of thousands of people on the scrap heap, consigning them to a future without jobs, hope or any kind of prospects for themselves and their families. I wonder how they dare sit in the Chamber today mouthing platitudes about division and regeneration.

I am perhaps the first Member representing a hard-pressed inner-city area to speak in the debate. The House needs to know the truth about what it is like to try to pick up the pieces after 18 years of Tory misrule. There is still huge unemployment in inner cities throughout the country. The national rate might be down to 5 or 6 per cent., but many inner-city wards still have more than 20 per cent. long-term hard, structural unemployment and generations that have not worked and have no prospect of doing so. There are huge problems of poverty, with 85 to 100 per cent. of children on free school meals in some schools in my constituency. Many of the poorest wards in the country are concentrated in inner-city areas and there are huge problems with health, teenage pregnancy, low birth rate and crime and disorder. Communities are fragmenting.

Hon. Members must realise that we do not all live in the lovely green Britain that we should like to see through our windows, but that many of us live in extremely difficult circumstances. Years of poverty, neglect and deprivation have led to unbalanced communities. Many inner-city areas have either elderly populations or lots of young people and students. There are few families or middle-class people and the communities are completely unbalanced. The challenge for this Government is to try to build sustainable communities with a mix of income, age and skills—people in work and people with something to contribute to their community.

What we have seen, however, is communities falling apart through crime, drugs and poor housing. The challenge to us is to build communities where people have skills and confidence, and to make our cities places where people want to live, work and bring up their families. It is no easy task.

I have a couple of practical suggestions to make to the Government. Unlike Conservative Members, Labour Members genuinely care about people who live in difficult conditions. We do not just shed crocodile tears to take cheap political advantage. First, jobs are absolutely crucial to regeneration. We need to draw investment into areas to create long-term, sustainable employment. To do that, we need to provide land. In many inner-city areas, the cost of reclaiming land and providing services far outstrips the ultimate value of that land. We must ensure that the regional development agencies are sufficiently well resourced to invest in the land needed to provide jobs for the future. It is not a matter of subsidies; it is about long-term investment, and we must recognise that land in inner-city areas is often not worth developing unless the RDA can reclaim it, install the services and make it in a fit state to attract investment.

Secondly, we must ensure that local people have the skills necessary to take up the jobs on offer. The North West regional development agency has just produced its economic and skills strategy, and the document was presented to the Deputy Prime Minister last week. It was prepared in the region, by the region, for the region. I am appalled that the Conservative party wants to abolish regional development agencies. It does not want local

[Ms Hazel Blears]

decision making, but wants to exercise power from the centre. Conservative Members talk about decentralisation, but they passed 106 pieces of local government legislation designed to draw power to themselves. It was government by diktat. This Government believe in decentralisation, sharing power and ensuring that decisions are taken locally.

We also need to tackle the housing crisis. We must recognise that housing problems differ from place to place. Many northern conurbations have a huge surplus of property; there are not thousands of people desperate for homes. In my area, one borough alone has 6,000 empty properties and one of my inner-city wards, which has huge problems, is losing a voter a day. People are simply upping sticks and walking away to look for work and opportunities because they cannot find them close to home, which is where we should be making the investment.

Some housing stock is simply no longer wanted. People want homes with gardens, somewhere to park their car and somewhere for children to play. Swathes of pre-1919, small terraced housing do not meet the needs of a modern society. Regeneration is not just about bricks and mortar, or about building homes and creating a shell for people to live in; if we are serious about sustainable regeneration, it must be about rebuilding families and communities, and giving people confidence and skills so that they want to live in their areas. That is not an easy task.

The Government are beginning to take action. We have £25 million from the single regeneration budget to deal with some of those deep-seated, long-term problems. Had we taken action 10 or 15 years ago, however, we would not have faced the massive problems that we now face. We would not have to spend millions of pounds to reinvigorate those communities, because they would not have been destroyed in the first place by the heartless, uncaring policies of the previous Government.

May I make a plea to the Government? We need long-term regeneration. We cannot have projects that last a couple of years and then finish; we must have sustainable projects to make those improvements. We need regeneration for the next 10 to 20 years if we are to ensure that our inner cities are vibrant places where people want to live. We also need to tackle crime in the inner cities, otherwise all the money that we invest might as well be poured down a black hole. Unless people feel safe in their communities, they will not want to live there. People will not come back to the cities and will not make them the exciting and vibrant places that we know they can be. People need to feel safe.

May I make another plea? In many northern areas, one of the biggest problems is that of private rented property. In one small area in the centre of my city, of 3,000 homes, 200 have private landlords. Many of them are good, decent landlords, but many others do not care what kind of tenants they have and are simply interested in getting their housing benefit. Unless there is a system of licensing and regulation of private rented property, those houses will continue to become derelict, empty and a blight on many of our communities.

The Government say that they do not want to regulate the private rented sector because that would depress the housing market in London. I am sorry, but many northern regions do not have the problem of excess demand; we have excess supply, which we need to regulate to ensure that landlords run their properties properly so that the communities improve. Will the Government look at the matter again and approach it flexibly? We need local solutions to local problems, which is what the Government believe in. Will they apply that to housing as well as everything else?

This debate is not simply about whether homes are needed in the south east, although some undoubtedly will be; it is about the deeper, underlying problems. I am grateful to the Opposition for initiating this debate because it has given us the chance to expose their hypocrisy, their complete rejection of their own policies, the failure of the free market and, above all, the desperate need of the poorest people in this country to be able to rely on the help of a Labour Government for a generation to come. We had the common-sense revolution in May 1997. Long may it continue.

6.7 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) raised some serious points and then trivialised them by a ludicrous painting of the previous Conservative Government. She should see things as they really were. When I was a Minister, I had regional responsibility for the north-east. The hon. Lady should go to the north-east and see the transformation that has occurred in both the housing estates and the infrastructure, among other things. She would then understand that Conservatives care deeply about social problems and urban regeneration. I cannot speak for the problems in Salford, but I can for the north-east, which is not known as a Conservative area and is a very long way from my constituency. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) did amazing things to encourage regeneration and the injection of private capital alongside public capital.

In his opening speech, the Minister used the phrase "one nation". My late father-in-law was a founder member of One Nation in this House in the early 1950s. It is often forgotten that that group was founded because of dissatisfaction with the then Conservative Government's housing policy. Housing is deeply engrained in Conservative policy because it is important for social stability. This debate, however, is about more than housing; it is about the Government's approach to the whole policy not only of urban regeneration, but of the protection of the countryside and greenbelt land.

I wish that the Minister had spent a little more time clarifying Government policy. Some of the policies that he mentioned could attract cross-party support. There is a continuing need for urban regeneration and a desire on the Opposition Benches, as well as on the Government Benches, for a bottom-up approach. Both sides of the House understand that housing must be put in the much wider context of infrastructure. All that is important. The problem is that the Crow report undermines many of the Government's better objectives.

The report issued this week by the Council for the Protection of Rural England says:

> "The Crow report flatly contradicts the many recent improvements which the Government has made to land use planning, urban and regional policy."

Why did not the Minister say that? I understand that he cannot anticipate the planning process and that there are all sorts of hearings, but as a former Minister, I did not

always take cover from that. I made my views clear when I disagreed with a report. The Crow report seems to undermine Government policy, but the Minister did not acknowledge that. He should have had the courage to do so, because in my judgment, that will leave him open to criticism from people across the country. We do not know where he stands on some of these crucial issues.

Genuine problems in Surrey need to be addressed. For the reasons that I gave in an earlier intervention, unless clear signals are given, developers will build up land banks in areas where they previously thought it was not worth doing so because they were never going to get planning permission. The Labour Government have not made their policy reaction clear. They could give planning permission on appeal and overrule the wishes of local authorities.

I noticed one critical comment from the Minister—either he was showing courage or I misunderstood him. He said that he would examine closely the Crow report's 50 per cent. target for brownfield sites, and he implied that he wanted the brownfield site target to be higher. Perhaps the Minister who winds up the debate will clarify that point.

Mr. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Ministers are in extreme difficulty in this area because of the possibility of judicial review? Before they make a pronouncement, they must consider all the detail. It is perhaps simplistic to want the Minister to make a pronouncement now. He has a duty to examine the detail before he makes a statement.

Mr. Taylor: I am familiar with the problems of judicial review, but that argument is a slight exaggeration in these circumstances. The Government set up the panel, and they have a policy. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we have a vacuum and that, until the Government make a formal pronouncement on the Crow report, they should have nothing more to say about these critical issues? That cannot please Labour Members any more than it pleases Conservative Members, or even the Liberal Democrats when they have a consistent policy to put forward.

The position in Surrey is becoming untenable. The recent Surrey Local Government Association report says:

"To require counties such as Surrey, which has over 70 per cent. of its undeveloped land within the Green Belt, to meet projected household formation in full, including a historic backlog, is to negate the very purpose of the Green Belt."

The green belt is crucial to the quality of life in all respects in counties such as Surrey. In my borough of Elmbridge, the effects would be severe. According to the Crow report, Surrey has the highest increase over the draft regional planning guidance figure—an 87 per cent. increase in housing allocation from 48,300 to 90,363. It is difficult to understand how we will go about accommodating that increase.

My borough council officers say that even the draft regional planning guidance figure of 48,300 would be difficult to manage. With local residents keen to protect the environment and character of their communities, the council will be put in a very difficult position. I endorse my local council's concern, and that is on the original target, not the increased allocation announced in the Crow report. That is the extent of the difficulty.

It is not that the south-east does not want to take its share of housing. Figures show that we have always planned for that, and have tried to attain sites. I know from my constituency that we need a mix of social housing. The difficulty is that many of the people who need to buy a house in my area cannot afford to do so. Increasing the number of houses will not make that much difference: it will merely reduce the quality of life.

I urge the Government to produce their integrated transport policy about which we have heard so much. By these targets in the south-east, they are encouraging more people to use cars. Moreover, last week, the Secretary of State overrode an inspector's decision and announced that there would be an M25 service station on land at Cobham Downside in my constituency, which will have considerable and justified local opposition. It is not clear where the Government stand on these issues.

There is a need to plan, monitor and provide for our housing, infrastructure and environmental needs—not the predict and provide elements that the Government, if they encourage the Crow process, are likely to follow. The Government should produce ideas on how to integrate some of the social criteria. It is not clear that mixed estates actually work. In parts of my constituency, social housing is integrated with other housing. We need to think these things through. I am not against the principle, but I want to see it work in practice.

There are other traffic and local infrastructure problems in my constituency. Several substantial developments around Portsmouth road were opposed in principle because of density problems, but they have now been built and are fitting into the environment. However, the traffic implications for Portsmouth road are considerable, and that is creating other tensions. It is not that we do not want development: we want development to be thought through, and we want to give primacy to local opinion. That is the crucial element.

Elmbridge borough council and its councillors deserve the right to state clearly how they can accommodate reasonable expectations, and not have unreasonable demands imposed on them. The Government should take a stand on that, because until they do, there will be deep distrust in my constituency about their true intentions.

6.16 pm

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I congratulate the Opposition on choosing this topic for debate, because it is of great importance. Dartford is in the middle of the Thames gateway, which is one of the fastest expanding areas of Europe, let alone the United Kingdom, so planning and development are of particular interest to me.

Unfortunately, the thrust of the Opposition's argument has been that planning is a threat. It is a way of frightening the public. The Conservatives frighten the public over Europe and health, and now they are frightening the public over planning. I take the opposite view. I see sensible planning as a significant opportunity to improve living conditions and the fabric of our society. There are good reasons for saying that. Great demographic changes are taking place in this country. Families are getting smaller and more people are choosing to live alone. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of households. Short of telling people not to live so long, it is difficult for the Government to do anything other than respond to the way in which society is going.

Great industrial changes are occurring. Heavy industry in Dartford has completely gone. The quarrying that made Dartford famous for 100 years has almost come to an end,

[Dr. Howard Stoate]

and most of the large quarrying has finished. Most of the cement works in Dartford are moving to other places and changing their operation altogether. That has left Dartford with a number of opportunities: for one thing, it has left some large holes in the ground, one of which is now Bluewater Park, the largest and most prestigious shopping centre in Europe which employs 9,000 people and has been an enormous success. That is an example of how planning can be used imaginatively to change the shape of society in the area and to bring investment as never before. The inward investment in that development is truly massive, and has solved many of the local problems. It has brought many jobs and opportunities to the area, which is to be welcomed.

Dartford has many other holes in the ground: many brownfield sites previously used for industry—some of them polluted—which need regeneration. That should not be regarded as a threat: it represents an opportunity to put right what has gone wrong in the past 100 years—to give something back to the community and to sort out some of the great difficulties that were left behind by a bygone age.

The Government must respond. I am pleased that their target is to have 60 per cent. of housing built on recycled land. The previous Government's target was 50 per cent., and they managed only 42 per cent. In Kent Thameside, which is my side of the river in the Thames gateway, 80 per cent. of new housing is being built on brownfield, recycled land. The target for Kent Thameside is 86 per cent. Over the next 20 years, 30,000 houses are to be built in Kent Thameside, 86 per cent. of which will be on recycled land. How can that be done without causing damage to existing communities? The Government must rise to that challenge, because such massive developments and such great changes can pose a threat to neighbourhoods and communities in the area.

We must ensure that we have sustainable development. If we bung houses on greenfield sites in the middle of nowhere, it is bound to lead to problems, which is why that is exactly what we should not be doing in Kent Thameside. Our approach is simple. Dartford has a local plan-led system. The local authority produces planning briefs which it sends out to prospective developers telling them what its requirements are for housing density, social housing, infrastructure, section 106 agreements involving community developments and so on. The local authority is therefore very much in control of the way in which land in Dartford and surrounding areas is developed, ensuring that we get the development that we want in the areas in which we want it, at the density that we want.

An exciting feature of my area is the fact that planners are trying to increase planning density. Again, that might be seen as a threat, but it could equally be seen as an opportunity. The planners are currently considering densities 50 per cent. higher than normal densities in suburban areas, and that is leading to some exciting spin-offs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) said earlier that if we were not careful we would get the density calculations wrong, and would end up with land that was not viable for development. In my area some land was so polluted and so damaged, and it cost so much to restore it, that its eventual value was virtually nil. That means that there is no great incentive for development. We should, however, take into account increasing housing densities. It is possible to fit more houses on to the land, and the development of that land thus becomes more viable for the good of the local community.

Another advantage of increased densities is the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods, and the viability of public transport. It is difficult for public transport systems to provide reasonable, affordable services in low-density areas: if they cannot fill the buses and trains, they will lose money. If densities are increased, public transport systems start to make a profit, and to become workable. The same applies to the building of schools and leisure developments.

Kent Thameside has another big advantage: we are able to create the necessary jobs. I am particularly interested in ensuring that, where possible, communities sustain their own employment, so that people need not travel so far and can live, work and play in the same area. If we use the current planning system properly—as I think Labour is doing: we are taking a responsible view—we can create sustainable, workable developments that will meet the demographic needs of the future.

I support what the Government are trying to do. They are increasing the use of brownfield land; they are employing the planning mechanism to ensure that sustainable development occurs wherever possible; and they are ensuring that recycled land is at the forefront of development. They are making certain that as little pressure as possible is put on greenfield land, so that we can preserve the best of what we have and make people's lives better in the future.

6.23 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Both the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) and the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) made an eloquent case for local decision making. The challenges faced in their constituencies are unique, and anyone who heard the account given on "Newsnight" of the problems on the estates in the hon. Lady's constituency will be in no doubt about Salford's difficulties. Nevertheless, it is entirely wrong to suggest that the same applies to the north-west as a whole—just as it is wrong to try to apply that template to current problems, as we have done for decades. We must change the culture involved in the way in which we tackle the general issue of development.

I am afraid that the Minister's speech does not enable me to take any reassurance back to my constituents. He said that he had paid close attention to the letter that I had signed, along with 69 of my colleagues. The attention cannot have been all that close: clearly the Minister cannot count to 70, as he suggested that only 67 had signed it. Moreover, rather than engaging with the arguments in the letter, he concentrated on point scoring, drawing attention to those who had or had not signed it.

We cannot underestimate the threat faced by, in particular, the south-east. The Minister tried to suggest that it was trite to talk about five cities the size of Southampton being built in the south-east. In fact, the Crow report recommends 12; five is simply the difference between Serplan's recommended figure of seven and 12, which amounts to 1.1 million houses. The Minister may sit there shaking his head, but we want to demonstrate the seriousness of the issue to our constituents, and this is a useful way of illustrating the scale of the building and

infrastructure that will go into the south-east. It is equivalent to 20 per cent. more houses—about 10,000 more houses in each constituency.

Those calculations are based on the household growth figures, which have been debated before. We must find a way of ceasing to be tied to those figures. We are talking about a population whose size is not changing throughout the country: we are talking about migration. The Minister wrote off migration, claiming that it was of little importance, but that is not true. I am indebted to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) for citing the Office for National Statistics figures which were given to Serplan, and which said that, over the last six years, the population of the south-east had increased—as a result of inward migration—by 196,200. That migration includes 39,500 from Merseyside, 50,900 from the West Midlands metropolitan area and 36,600 from the Greater Manchester area.

A problem has clearly been caused by migration from the north, the north-west, the midlands and other parts of the country to the south-east. Those are precisely the people whom the hon. Member for Salford is trying to retain, in order to build sustainable communities in her area. If, by our national policy, we encourage the building of houses down in the south-east to follow economic demand, we shall make the task of Government, and that of Members representing constituencies in more challenged regions, infinitely more difficult.

Mr. Bennett: Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to tell all local authorities in his area that they should stop trying to promote development by industry in their areas?

Mr. Blunt: No. The judgment must be made by local people. Local authorities are in the best position to judge whether their areas are in serious need of economic regeneration—in which case they should have a relaxed planning policy, encouraging firms to come in—or whether the major danger to those whom they represent is the destruction of their quality of life by the concreting of the countryside and the "levering" of vast numbers of houses into towns whose infrastructure is already overstretched, which would ruin the community, even if the result was a degree less of economic growth.

I believe that, in some respects, the Crow analysis is fundamentally flawed. It is based on the view that economic opportunities should be increased everywhere. The philosophy that a growth in gross domestic product comes first and foremost, and that every other consideration is secondary, is a disaster for the south-east of England—as is Crow's view that the south-east should be recognised as having a role as the gateway to the United Kingdom and

"as an engine of growth in the national economy, and that the regional economy therefore needs to be supported and further developed throughout."

That philosophy will cause areas such as Salford to face an even greater challenge than they face now.

Reading the Crow report, I feel that we have interrupted a debate between planners of the 1960s and planners of the 1940s. I am not familiar with the history of planning, and had not previously encountered the views criticised by Professor Crow and his panel. According to them, the view that one should be more restrictive about supporting economic growth in the south-east in order to confer advantage to other parts of the country,

"with its manifest overtones of post-war Barlow based industrial development policy, we were advised was not current Government thinking. Rather, it was a question of the economy being encouraged 'to go ahead at full speed on all engines'."

I had not come across Mr. Barlow before, but I must say that I am warming to him. I am not entirely sure, however, that trying to apply templates of the 1940s or the 1960s now is the answer. We have arrived, just about, at the new millennium, and we shall have to look at how we deal with all these issues in a completely new way.

Professor Crow goes on to say:

"The policy designation of 'Area of Economic Pressure' should be deleted from draft RPG, to be replaced by a policy which seeks out smaller local areas where road congestion and labour shortage are to be tackled positively, by . . . the elimination of congestion hot-spots and by new house-building . . . within sustainable travelling distance."

We cannot eliminate regional hot spots and congestion by house building: indeed, house building will make them worse because the need will arise to provide infrastructure—to provide schools and to ensure that people can take their children to school and get to work—in all those areas. We cannot assume that we can get rid of congestion by building houses. That seems an extraordinary suggestion.

Dr. Starkey: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a certain population density leads to congestion but is not enough to sustain a proper public transport system, and that, in those circumstances, it is precisely by intensifying development that we can allow public transport to develop and to relieve the congestion?

Mr. Blunt: There may be merit in the hon. Lady's case, but the position will vary from community to community. Communities are in the best position to come to those judgments, rather than the Government trying to impose a template on the whole country, which is the position that we are in. The Stephen Crow report says that Serplan was not allowed to advocate reducing the number of houses that should be built in the south-east. It considered that advocating changes in Government policy—diverting from the Government's target of 1.1 million houses in the south-east, which is what falls out of the household projection—was out of place in the regional planning guidance.

We will still be on predict and provide, unless Ministers are brave enough to reject the Crow numbers completely. The point has been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor). It is not possible for Surrey to accommodate even the Serplan totals, let alone the new total: the increase of 120 per cent. advocated by Professor Crow. If the Minister rejects the Crow numbers, he will reject—I would thoroughly welcome it—the total number for the whole country.

We have welcomed the rhetoric of the Government and the comments that were attributed to the Deputy Prime Minister in the debate in the House in February last year, but, when the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs examined Government policy, it found that the rhetoric was still not supported by detail.

[Mr. Blunt]

For example, the Committee found, at paragraph 14 of its report:

"The remarkable aspect of this section of the draft PPG is that it makes no mention of Plan, Monitor and Manage, the new system for ensuring the provision of housing."

The Committee says that it received evidence that the system

"now appears very similar to predict and provide".

It said:

"We recommend that the final PPG outline how the plan, monitor and manage system will operate."

Obviously, that will be—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

6.33 pm

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): I am grateful to be called to make what will be, I suspect, one of my shortest contributions ever in the Chamber.

Having heard the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) expound the bizarre theory that is set out in the "Common Sense Revolution for Town and Country" document, I suspect that my constituents will be scared rigid at the prospect of his return to office. What on earth would happen if he ever got his hands on the planning system in England? I only wish that my constituents could have been in the public gallery to hear his speech.

My constituency is on the edge of the Bradford district. Like those of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), my constituents have seen the steady erosion of important and valuable greenfield sites over the past couple of decades, largely because of the rigid predict and provide approach that was taken by the Conservative Administration.

I am a keen supporter of the move towards a more flexible approach. Let us look at moving away from predict and provide towards a system where local needs can be met in more flexible local plans, taking into account local demands. I am also keen to see a real move towards the use of recycled land.

One of the things that scares me most about the Conservative policy document is its undertone—its subtext. If hon. Members read it carefully, they will see a variety of quotes that add up to an attack on northern greenfield sites in particular. The right hon. Member for Wokingham said again today that local authorities—not all; just those in well-developed areas that already have high employment—should be allowed to halt new damaging greenfield developments. I am glad to see the right hon. Gentleman nodding.

That means that, in constituencies such as mine, green fields are less important; they do not really matter. My constituents value their green open spaces just as much as the right hon. Gentleman's constituents do. They will be shocked and appalled at the new threat that the Conservatives will pose come the next general election. I hope that the move towards social engineering— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have loud private conversations. I am speaking to certain Conservative Members.

Mr. Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Conservative Members do not want to listen because they have twigged the fatal flaw in their planning policies—it is anti-northernism writ large. They are moving towards social engineering, saying that people cannot live where they want to live, and that they will say where people will live. They are not just saying, "Not in my backyard"; they are saying, "Not in your backyard."

The move towards engineering where people should live not only smacks of bizarre lurch-to-the-right type Thatcherism but is strange in other ways. Traffic congestion would increase enormously. Commuters would travel even further distances throughout the country. I do not know quite what has inspired the policy, except that I feel that the Conservatives are looking at their constituencies and forgetting about what the rest of the nation needs, as ever. It does not matter to those on the Conservative Front Bench what the problems are in the Bradford district, where a number of sites, including Warren lane in Gilstead, Sty lane in Micklethwaite and Jenny lane in Baildon have been threatened as a result of the unitary development plans that were set up under the previous Administration. Those sites are valued and cherished by local residents. They would all be threatened by the Conservatives' new policy, which says that local authorities in the south, which is well developed and where there is no problem with unemployment, can have freedom to turn down greenfield development, but those in the north, where there are problems with regeneration and so on, have to take on such development. That is an outrage, and the sooner people know about it, the better.

6.38 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The debate has been instructive in many ways. From those on the Conservative Benches, we have heard common-sense, practical suggestions that would protect our green fields and regenerate our inner cities; from those on the Government Benches, a desperation to argue only about the past—no hope, no vision, no ideas. The Minister's feeble attempt to live in the past contrasted starkly with forward-looking contributions from my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and my hon. Friends the Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), for Totnes (Mr. Steen), for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) and for Reigate (Mr. Blunt).

What is bizarre about the Government's attitude to the debate is that all we are doing is asking the Government to do something that is right and popular: stop concreting over our green fields and start rebuilding our great cities. In response to that modest and sensible proposal, all we get is sour-faced abuse, not least from the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, who has not been here for a second of the debate.

Mr. Caplin: As a Kent Member, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the position in the county of Sussex. Does he accept that, in the western part of Sussex, in the past 20 years, his party concreted over with retail just about every site possible along the A27 corridor? Is it not about time that he and others apologised to the House?

Mr. Green: I commend to the hon. Gentleman our policy on common sense for the environment, which proposes giving more power to local councils, so that they are able to decide the amount of development that they want. He should also confer on Labour's position with the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie)—who, not five

minutes ago, made exactly the opposite argument—so that we may have some coherent argument from Labour Members. Their position is so incoherent because they are deeply embarrassed by the gap between the overblown promises that they made in opposition and the overwhelming disappointment that they have delivered in office.

On 25 January 1997, in a Labour press release, the current Minister for the Environment stated:

"We will make the next Labour Government the first truly green Government that Britain has ever seen."

The reality is that every pressure group dealing with the environment thinks that that target has been missed completely.

The head of policy for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said that the Prime Minister

"is not interested in the environment and he has surrounded himself with advisers"—

and Ministers—

"who are not interested either".

If the Government do not want to take criticism from environmental non-governmental organisations, perhaps they will take it from an organisation that is not often quoted by a Conservative spokesman—the Fabian Society. The society's general secretary has recently produced a pamphlet, which states:

"it's evident that New Labour is not comfortable on this territory"—

the environment, in other words. The pamphlet continues:

"Labour does not perceive environmental issues to be major priorities for ordinary voters. In fact they tend to see them as positively anti-voter".

I think that that is an honest assessment of the Government's attitude to all environmental matters.

The effects of the Government's neglect may be seen across the country, but perhaps nowhere more starkly than in Hertfordshire. This morning, I visited the now infamous site—mentioned several times in the debate—west of Stevenage where the Government have approved the concreting over of 2,000 unspoilt acres. It will be an act of desecration which has been proposed and pushed through by a Lib-Lab council pact. We should, therefore, be spared any sanctimonious noises from Liberal Democrat Members on their concern for the environment.

Ms Ward: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that, without the west of Stevenage development, every little piece of green space in town centres in places such as Stevenage and my own constituency of Watford will be packed with new houses, diminishing the amenities of those who already live in those overcrowded towns and cities?

Mr. Green: Although that might be valid generally, it is not valid for Stevenage—which I recommend that the hon. Lady visit. The Government and their allies want to destroy four unspoilt miles of Langley valley, although immediately adjacent to it is a large derelict industrial site—which is precisely where new development would not only be welcome, but would improve the environment. I urge the Minister to visit the site, where, in one place, one is able to comprehend everything that is wrong with the Government's planning policy. He should go there and repent.

I was, therefore, pleased to join Conservative councillors who are fighting that dreadful plan by signing a countryside charter for Hertfordshire, in an attempt to defend green land that the Government want to desecrate. Across the country, however, we shall suffer similar vandalism if the Government do not change course.

Much of today's debate has been about the Crow report, which has singled out my own constituency for what it calls, with ghastly clarity, "plan-led growth". It wants to triple the size of Ashford in 20 years—ripping up Kent, making a patio of the garden of England. Sadly, one leading member of the local Labour party has already welcomed the plan. In a letter to a local newspaper, the *Kentish Express*, she has even described it as the Deputy Prime Minister's "future vision for Ashford". I genuinely hope that she is misrepresenting him, and that a concrete jungle is not his vision of the future.

Nevertheless, a pattern is emerging. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate produced a letter protesting against the Crow report, but Labour Members ran a mile rather than sign it. Labour Members, too, should repent. Will they join us today in the Lobby, to protest about the Crow report? If that is a bit brave for them, will they at least publicly abstain in the Division?

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: No; I do not have enough time.

Conversely, will Labour Members insult their constituents and demonstrate their lack of independence? Although the hon. Member for Watford (Ms Ward) said that she wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister, she did not say what she wrote.

Ms Ward: The hon. Gentleman will probably not be surprised to hear that I have some concerns about the report. However, the Secretary of State is considering responses to the Crow report in a manner allowing sufficient lead-in time in which to consult. He does not want to make the decision on the hoof, as Conservative Members would like him to do.

Mr. Green: If the hon. Lady is saying that she is against the proposals, I shall welcome her support for our motion.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey), too, should read our policy document. She described the type of development that she wants, and our proposals would allow local people to decide the level of local development—*[Interruption.]* The Minister for Local Government and the Regions should attend debates before she tries to disrupt the reply to them.

Dr. Starkey: Does the hon. Gentleman concede that his Conservative colleagues on Buckinghamshire county council—aided and abetted by some of the Liberal Democrat council members—support the notion of additional housing in Milton Keynes as a way of avoiding building it in the rest of Buckinghamshire—but do not support the notion of its being plan led and simply want it crammed in?

Mr. Green: As I said, the hon. Lady is welcome to agree with our proposal to ensure that development is

[Mr. Green]

based on local decisions. I am also glad that Labour Members are now on record as favouring plan-led growth, which is a severe threat to many parts of the country, and not only to the south-east.

We are suspicious of the Secretary of State's motives because, under the Crow proposals, he would be able to make general remarks on development levels. He should reject Crow also because Crow rejects the Government's own policy. The Deputy Prime Minister said that predict and provide is dead, but the Crow report said that household projections

"must be used as the basis for establishing the regional provision for housing".

Although the report flatly contradicts the Government's own policy, the Secretary of State cannot bring himself to reject it.

I offer some constructive suggestions for action that the Government could take to protect the land. Ministers should make the planning process more sensitive to the views of local people and more open and transparent. They should scrap rigid central forecasts of housing need and protect the green belt.

Those of us who have some affection for the Deputy Prime Minister's unique relationship with the English language simply smiled when, on 16 April 1999, he said:

"The Green Belt is a Labour achievement, and we mean to build on it."

The problem is that we were being too kind to him—he really meant it. Now, we have seen a leaked report from the performance and innovation unit, stating a desire to build also on our prime agricultural land. No green field is safe from the Government.

Today, will the Minister at least give us a reassurance that moves to weaken controls on land that is now protected from development will be strongly resisted by the Department?

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): The Conservative motion mentions "limiting greenfield housing construction". Do their arguments apply also to commercial development?

Ms Ward: Or to roads?

Mr. Green: I should love to deal with commercial development and with roads, but, in three minutes, it would be a little ambitious even to try. Everything proposed in the debate by Labour Members entailed increasing the need for cars, and therefore for roads. The Government are being spectacularly incoherent on that issue.

The way to avoid the two Britains that the Government are creating is to regenerate our towns and cities, in both the south and the north. We could do that by setting higher targets for brownfield development; altering planning guidance, to make it easier to build on those brown fields; and taking the Rogers report seriously, not simply filing it away, as the Government have done.

The Government should realise that once Britain's trees, fields and wildlife have gone, they are gone for ever. The Government who are responsible for that destruction will deserve the anger and contempt of future generations for letting it happen.

The Government are failing the cities and the countryside, and breaking their pre-election promises. They are creating two nations: one that is overbuilt and overcrowded; another that is underdeveloped or under-regenerated. In planning, as in so much else, the Government's claim to the one-nation mantle is a great Labour lie. I commend our motion to the House.

6.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): As we might have expected, this has been a lively debate, with some excellent speeches by my hon. Friends. We have also heard a great deal of outrage, and not a little amnesia, expressed by Conservative Members. Nevertheless, I am glad that they have discovered—albeit belatedly—a new concern about the green belt and about how to marry the competing objectives of enabling economic growth, providing homes and protecting the countryside.

The debate has highlighted the fact that Conservative Members have still not accepted responsibility for their past failures; they still do not understand the complex natures of these issues, and are still floundering to put together an effective policy to deal responsibly with them. It is no surprise that Conservative Members want to forget about the past, but we will not let them, because they are responsible for the current situation.

Let me remind Conservative Members of a few facts. First, the previous Administration regarded planning as an obstacle to free-market economics. They thought that the decisions of the market would be in everybody's best interests and that they should prevail. The greenfield housing estates and out-of-town developments that appear to upset Conservative Members so much have, for the best part of the past two decades, been the result of their Government's "let green fields rip" policy. In every year of the last decade the Conservative party was in power, there was a net loss to the green belt. I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) and for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) for outlining the devastation that their constituencies have experienced, and for describing the Conservative Government's abject failure to protect the green belt. Much as we would like to, we cannot reverse the direction of their planning and development system overnight. Planning permissions have five-year lives, and some of the previous Government's legacy is still being felt.

Secondly, although Opposition Members have spent the past few hours rubbishing the system of planning for housing, they invented it and then enforced it for many years. Predict and provide is an inflexible, dictatorial, top-down approach, which ignored local views, although the current Conservative approach is to take them into account. I acknowledge the comments of the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) on the impact of that system on homelessness and housing, but his suggestion of taxing and spending his way out of those problems is not an option.

Thirdly, none of the Tory speakers acknowledged the run-down of our towns and cities, the failure to help people living in the countryside, the growing gap between regions and the impact of industrial and rural decline under the Tories that caused so much human and economic suffering. Indeed, the right hon. Member for

South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) chose to ignore the fact that, under her Government, 100,000 farming jobs in the countryside were lost. In stark contrast was the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who graphically outlined the impact of Tory policies on her constituency.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning outlined in some detail the radical change of policy on planning that we have instituted, including a real ownership of decision-making through the regional process—a local, transparent system. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) for highlighting a fact that seems to have escaped Conservative Members' notice—that the issues of green belt land and countryside are particularly important for constituents living in the north and in industrial areas.

My hon. Friends the Members for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) gave a considered analysis of the complex set of social, economic, demographic and environmental issues that we face. They referred to the need for a balanced, flexible but robust approach to meet those competing objectives.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) was the one exception on the Tory Benches who made a thoughtful contribution. I do not want to get the hon. Gentleman into trouble, but I am pleased that he supports the Government's emphasis on the importance both of design and of the sequential approach. We have had constructive meetings with Stuart Lipton to take those issues forward.

The hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) raised many detailed questions. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman fully understands the issue, but I can tell him that PPG3 will be published by the end of the year, when it will become effective, and that inspectors will be able to take account of infrastructure in applying the sequential approach.

Conservative Members made a great deal of the issue of migration to the south-east, and of the panel report. Most people looking for housing in the south-east are south-easterners. Pulling up the drawbridge, as the Tories want, will price local people out of the housing market and cause untold misery. It is a shame that the hon. Members for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) did not listen to my hon. Friend the Minister of State when he said that our response to the panel report is under consideration; it will be a detailed response, and we will give it as soon as we can. In the meantime, those hon. Gentlemen would serve their constituencies better if they stopped talking about fear and time bombs and started thinking constructively about the issues faced by their constituents.

The Tories' so-called common-sense revolution proposes a number of policies. Sustainable and development protecting the green belt—we are doing it; regenerating towns and cities—we are doing it; modernising the planning system—we are doing that too. There is a revolution taking place, and it was started in May 1997 by this Government. Not for the first time, the Tories are behind the times, and I am glad that they are adopting some of our policies now.

Conservative proposals for dismantling our new planning structure at regional level are nothing short of irresponsible. Such proposals would result in essential houses not being available for people in the area who need them. What about local need? What about the children of families living in the south and the south-east? What about those who cannot afford to buy a home? What about older people in housing need? The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) would have them all turned out and forced to live somewhere else—presumably in the north, as he puts it. He does not want them on his patch, and most would be completely priced out of the market by the reductions in housing provision that he proposes. *[Interruption.]* We can always tell when we are touching a nerve. Far from planning for one nation, the right hon. Gentleman's latest proposals would result in two nations—the well-off who could afford to stay in the south, and the rest who would have to fend for themselves.

The hypocrisy of the Tories' new-found deathbed concern about the divide between rich and poor, north and south is truly breathtaking. They shed crocodile tears about the two Britains that their Government did so much to create, but their proposals are nothing more than a thinly veiled version of that well-known Tory tradition—a policy not for the many, but just for the few.

We know all about Tory policy on two Britains. What else would we expect from the party that closed the pits, shut the steelworks, devastated manufacturing, ignored the countryside and left the regions to fend for themselves in the name of the free market? People out there will tell the Tories what they told them in May 1997: "On your bike, and take your nonsensical policy with you."

The Government are repairing the damage done by the Tories. We are safeguarding the countryside, regenerating towns and cities, rebuilding communities and ensuring a sustainable future for all our regions and the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North–East Hampshire) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 185, Noes 346.

Division No. 280] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick

Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speiman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Jacqui Lait and Mr. Stephen Day

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil

Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mr. Clive Betts.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's continued commitment to sustainable growth, safeguarding the countryside and promoting an urban renaissance; welcomes the establishment of Regional Development Agencies and the policies and programmes which have been put in place to improve the prosperity and quality of life of the regions and supports the targeting of regeneration initiatives in areas of greatest need; recognises that the Government's integrated, inclusive and strategic approach is encouraging urban and industrial regeneration; welcomes the Government's inter-linked policies for revitalising the UK's towns and cities and protecting the countryside; supports the Government's target for building 60 per cent. of all new housing on previously developed land and welcomes the new housing planning policy guidance which encourages "in town" brownfield site development first under a phased sequential test; supports this Government's approach to new out-of-town shopping developments; welcomes the Government's move away from the previous "predict and provide" approach to housing provision and the introduction of a "plan, monitor and manage" policy under the new regional planning policy arrangements, including Examination in Public and Independent Panel assessment; recognises the need for a more detailed evaluation of land availability and capacity and welcomes the establishment of a National Land Use Database; supports the Government's policies on protecting the Green Belt; and believes the Government's planning, housing, transport, countryside protection, welfare and economic policies will achieve more sustainable and equitable patterns of both urban and rural development.

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [28 October].

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

That on the fifth day on which the House sits in the next Session the Bill shall be presented to the House;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill presented in the House in the present Session;

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means;

That the Chairman of Ways and Means shall make such Amendments thereto as have been made by the committee in the present Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to be considered;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Question again proposed.

7.14 pm

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are about to consider further the carry-over resolution on the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill. On previous consideration of the Bill, I asked whether the Human Rights Act 1998 applied to it. We were informed that section 19 of that Act, which obliges the promoter of a public Bill—a Minister—to make a statement about the compliance of proposed legislation with that Act, did not apply to a private Bill. When I raised the matter, we were informed that as there was no Minister promoting or in charge of the Bill, because it was a private Bill, that section of the Human Rights Act did not apply.

May I ask for clarification from you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—if not this evening, at least for the future? I hope that this Bill will die tonight, but for future such legislation, we need to know whether the House can be advised whether the Human Rights Act applies to private legislation.

Surely any legislation coming before the House must comply with the Human Rights Act, which the House passed overwhelmingly in November 1998. Surely the House must be advised in some way—if not by a Minister, by an Officer of the House—whether a piece of proposed legislation that comes before the House complies with that Act, and with the human rights convention. I seek clarification from you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the sake of our consideration of future legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving notice of his point of order. As the House knows, there is nothing in the Human Rights Act that applies its provisions to private legislation. The House will also understand that it is not possible for the occupant of the Chair unilaterally to change the rules of the House, which are of general application, in respect of the Bill that is the subject of tonight's carry-over motion. However, I believe that what the hon. Gentleman has said in making his point of order will be given further consideration, and I thank him for raising the matter.

7.17 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): The principle reflected in this evening's motion—that a private Bill may be carried over from one Session to the next—is well established. It informed the recommendations of the Modernisation Committee's third report, on carrying over public Bills, which was agreed by the House on 9 March 1998.

We have recent experience of the carry-over procedure for the Financial Services and Markets Bill, which was debated last week. That was a novelty, but the practice of carrying over private Bills is well established. Paragraph 3 of the report of the Modernisation Committee says:

"The main purpose of this procedure is to avoid the repetition of the processes and expense peculiar to private legislation."

The procedure is often—perhaps I may even venture to say usually—a formality. The London Local Authorities Bill, for instance, was carried over without debate last week. The Bill before us has, as I have particular reason to know, enjoyed a degree of controversy in the House. Subject to the will of the House in supporting the motion, I have no doubt that we shall have further debates in the new Session on the substance of the Bill—but tonight is procedural, and I will therefore not seek now to range over its detailed provisions.

I would, however, like to refer to the principle of the use of rateable values in the Bill to establish the number of people eligible for appointment, and to the Select Committee's special report, because both are clearly of interest to many hon. Members.

The use of rateable values in the Bill is simply a mechanism to achieve an end—to give the many City businesses that are now incorporated rather than conducted as partnerships or sole proprietorships a voice. That can be misleadingly portrayed as a concept that predates the great Reform Act, and equates money to votes, conjuring up the picture of individuals voting strength being dependent on the size of the property that they occupy.

I first invite hon. Members to recall the fact that when, in 1835, the Municipal Corporations Act reformed the local government franchise in the wake of the changes to the parliamentary franchise, the electoral qualification that was put in place comprehended the £10 ratepayer vote. For businesses in the City, the link between rateable value and voting entitlement has endured because of the reasons set out by Lord Callaghan, when he was Home Secretary, during the debate on the Representation of the People Bill in November 1968. Those reasons were recorded on Second Reading of this Bill, so I shall not repeat them.

In relation to the link, clause 3 makes it clear that the ability to appoint any voter applies to incorporated or unincorporated bodies and not to individuals. Moreover, the Bill is explicit in providing that no individual will be

able to have more than one vote in any ward election. Thus, the notion that the Bill provides for an individual's voting strength to be proportional to the size of the property that he occupies is quite mistaken.

In addition, in making appointments, newly eligible businesses, which have a multiple entitlement to appoint individuals, will be required to have regard to the composition of their work force. That is in clause 4. Those whom businesses appoint will need to have a strong association with the City—at the very least they must have been working there, for the past year, for the business that appoints them. If retired—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am always reluctant to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but he has already commented that we are debating a carry-over motion and not the content of the Bill. Perhaps he might bear that in mind.

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful for your rebuke, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was seeking to head off the charge that I was making no reference whatever to what the Bill was about.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I was the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure in the late 1980s, which originally recommended a carry-over procedure for private Bills—a fact to which my right hon. Friend was kind enough to refer. It is important for the House to take account of the fact that a carry-over motion is designed specifically to ensure that the expense and the work on such a Bill that have already taken place, with considerable effort from the promoters—whether the City of London or others—are not lost.

The motion is not designed to defeat a Bill because someone objects to its contents; it is intended to ensure that the Bill can be fully considered at a later stage. After the amount of work that has gone into this Bill and its amendments, it would seem extremely strange if the House did not to agree to its being carried over so that it could proceed in the normal manner.

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention. It was more helpful than he could have imagined, because it gave me the opportunity to examine how I could adjust my speech in the light of your observations, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. McDonnell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This may give the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) a little more time. Will you clarify whether your ruling means that we are not allowed to refer to the quality of the Bill in the debate on the motion? For most of us, the deciding factor will be whether the Bill deserves to be carried over.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can use his ingenuity. I always try to be flexible when I am in the Chair. My point was about dwelling on such matters. I am sure that there is a way of saying that the Bill should not be carried over, but it is not for me to put words into the hon. Gentleman's mouth.

Mr. Brooke: There are several other topics to which I might have alluded, had you not so sagely and sagaciously intervened in my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to make it clear to those who sat on the Special Select Committee which examined the Bill that some of my observations would have related to their report, and that I mean no discourtesy to them by not dwelling on those matters at this juncture.

I am mindful of your observations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I point out that the Bill has already been subject to extensive scrutiny in Select Committee and on consideration, and to a full debate on Second Reading. The City is atypical, which is reflected in the nature of the proposals. In judging the merits, as the House will have the opportunity to do—provided tonight's motion is agreed—it will be worth recalling that criticism can be made of most, if not all, electoral systems. That has been demonstrated during this Session.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): If the Bill is carried over and eventually becomes law, one of the provisions—in one of the amendments introduced by the Select Committee—would enable the House to continue to consider, during the years ahead, matters arising in the City of London that are connected to its franchise, so that we can monitor what happens and ensure that the reforms are effective.

Mr. Brooke: I am as grateful to my hon. Friend as I was to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), and, indeed, to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend is correct—he was a most distinguished Chairman of the Special Select Committee. The measure would provide the future opportunity that he describes.

Other electoral systems are subject to criticism, as has been demonstrated in our debates, during this and the previous Session, on proportional representation and the party list system. We shall doubtless hold further debates—albeit in other contexts—on the merits or demerits of alternative mechanisms intended to secure democratic accountability, whether by election or appointment. I simply express the hope that, in taking forward to the new Session the debate on the Bill, the yardstick against which its proposals are judged takes adequate account of the imperfections of the landscape.

7.26 pm

Mr. McDonnell: I ask the leave of the House to introduce my speech by noting that, two weeks ago, I came to a debate after attending the funeral of my constituent, who was the driver of the crashed Great Western train and that, today, several of my colleagues and I have come from the funeral of PC Kalwant Sidhu, who, only a fortnight ago, died while serving our community. He showed a fine example of duty in the Metropolitan police service and in the Sikh community. I am sure that the whole House would want to send our condolences to his family today.

We have a heavy week ahead of us, with a schedule containing important measures and debates—possibly with some late night sittings—so tonight is not a time to delay the House. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] Hon. Members should not be too encouraged. We want to move swiftly to a vote: either to destroy the Bill tonight, as it deserves, so that it is not carried over; or, at least, to move to the next stage in a war of attrition against the backwoodsmen of the City corporation—perhaps we

[Mr. McDonnell]

should just call it the lodge of lodges. It is not the last bastion of privilege and freemasonry in this country, but it might be the biggest.

Why should the Bill be allowed to proceed? Why should the House waste invaluable parliamentary time on this tawdry retrograde step? Why should we, as the mother of Parliaments—the fount of democracy, as we call ourselves—waste our time protecting privilege and rejecting the democratic principle through this Bill?

Mr. Robert Jackson: The hon. Gentleman might find part of the answer to those questions if he took the trouble to read the book written by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, his hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). The book is entitled "Cities for the Future" and has a preface by the Prime Minister. It contains much interesting material on the importance of London and the City of London and their contribution to the British and the world economy.

Mr. McDonnell: I am grateful for that intervention; it helps us to demystify the measure. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, there has been a conflation between the City and the City corporation. As we know, the City is an engine of our economy. There are some criticisms to be made of it, but we shall come to those when we debate the economy. However, the City corporation should not be confused with the City itself. The corporation is a group of hangers-on, who create what is known as the best dining club in the City. They bear no relationship to the creation of wealth by the City.

I too have received the book mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. He will have noticed that the constant theme throughout the book is democratic renewal and the right of residents to decide their future. That is what the Bill fails to do.

Mr. Jackson: The precise point of the Bill is to strengthen the connection between the City corporation and business interests in the City, so that the corporation has a more accurate voice on behalf of what goes on in the City.

Mr. McDonnell: The tragedy is that the Bill does not do that. It simply extends the right to buy votes. Instead of basing those votes on the workers who work in the City and create the wealth, strengthened by the resident voters in the City, the City corporation has rejected the extension of that right to the people who actually work to create the wealth so that they can have some influence on their workplace—the environment in which they work. We moved an amendment to that effect and discussed it at length—even ad nauseam. The City corporation has refused to budge, but perhaps we can return to that matter later.

Tonight we are debating whether the Bill deserves to be carried over to take up more parliamentary time. Surely there are many more just causes than the protection of a rotten borough on which the House can spend its time. In the current Session, we have been told that there has been insufficient time to ban fox hunting or to have a thorough debate on pensions, policing in London, poverty, age discrimination and other forms of discrimination. We have had inadequate time for those matters because we have spent several nights debating the Bill. In addition, a raft of private Member's Bills has been logjammed for lack of parliamentary time—yet we manage to fix some parliamentary time for the City corporation whenever it asks. Given the competing demands for parliamentary time, it is important that the Bill should not be carried over to take up time in the next Session—it should not see the light of day again.

If we are to spend time on reforming the City corporation, let a proper reform Bill be introduced—one that is based on the democratic principle of universal suffrage: one person, one vote, not one business, as many votes as it can purchase.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): On the same principle, does the hon. Gentleman intend to vote against the Government's proposals on reforming the other House because that would not recognise the democratic principle either?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I spoke earlier about allowing some leeway, but the hon. Gentleman is pushing the boat out a bit too far.

Mr. McDonnell: There is a valid argument to be made about ensuring that we have either a democratically elected second Chamber or none at all, but I shall observe Mr. Deputy Speaker's instructions and move on to discuss the tests against which the House can judge whether the Bill should be carried over.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I delayed intervening because I wanted to hear the hon. Gentleman's arguments about the shortage of parliamentary time. I do not know whether he was in the House last night, but he should speak to the business managers, because by this time last night, having discussed the important question of whether Acts should be printed on vellum, the House had suspended. Perhaps the business managers could in future be rather more careful about the allocation of time.

Mr. McDonnell: I was in the House last night attending various meetings, but I followed the day's debate throughout. I shall meet the Government Whips and suggest that, in future, I be allowed to assist in planning the House's timetable. I shall keep the hon. Gentleman informed of progress.

The key question is what are the tests against which we can judge whether the Bill should be carried over. For many of us, the test is whether it is line with the Government's manifesto on which they were elected—will the Bill fulfil a manifesto pledge? The Labour Government are committed to implementing 177 manifesto commitments within the lifetime of this Parliament. I do not want to go over the sordid tale of how we arrived at the current position, whereby the Government support the Bill, save to say that the exercise of power and influence by the City of London corporation from 1992 has been an object lesson in the naked abuse of privilege. It is not often that we can pull back the veil and reveal the face of the British establishment in all its ugly, threatening grotesqueness, but the privilege exercised by the City corporation is an example of what power can do.

Traditionally, the Labour party had a principled commitment to abhor votes based on money and privilege and to promote universal suffrage; hence, Labour was from its earliest days committed to the abolition of the City corporation as constituted, whereby votes are bought based on wealth and there are insider dealings in connections to get a seat on the common council—it is not what you know, but who you know and who can be bought. Labour's argument was that it should be replaced with a democratic institution. However, from 1992 onwards, the City corporation realised that the prospect of a Labour Government put privilege at risk, so every resource and sinew of connection and influence were mobilised by the corporation elite to bring Labour to heel. The corporation established a public relations team, set aside resources and started a long-term lobbying strategy. The tragedy is that new Labour was all too ready to become an adornment of the corporation. All it took was a few phone calls and a couple of dinner parties and, in the 1997 manifesto, the Labour party sought, not abolition or democratic reform, but only reform.

Does the Bill constitute reform and should it be carried over? Does it contain any element of democratic reform? It does not bring about universal suffrage based on one person, one vote, but maintains business votes based on ownership. It goes further—it is regressive, introducing a system whereby the buying of votes by more business is facilitated. Under the proposed system, the extension of votes is up for sale, depending on how much land in the City can be bought. The argument in July—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the House is debating a carry-over motion. He can apply his arguments in the next Session.

Mr. McDonnell: That is, if the Bill gets to the next Session: I believe that the arguments we advance tonight will ensure that the Bill goes no further. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you will permit me to elaborate on why the Bill does not deserve to be carried over.

In July, the then Minister for London and Construction, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), argued that the Bill was the first stage of a sequence—a "drive for reform". We were told that if we voted against the Bill at any stage, that drive for reform would be stifled. That is laughable—how can a Labour Minister believe that the extension of the right to buy votes can be part of a drive for democratic reform? Such a Bill does not even deserve publication, let alone carry-over. It is embarrassing to see such a fawning bending of a Labour Minister's knee to privilege. I do not want to give Millbank any ideas, but we should be grateful for the mercy that the same system has not been introduced for the selection of the Labour candidate for London's mayor.

Turning to the concessions set out in the Bill, one has to ask whether they justify its being carried over. Like drawing teeth from a rotting carcase, those supposed concessions have been wrung out of the City corporation during the Bill's passage. The first is that voters should have a "connection" with the City. We are asked to be grateful for the fact that the person who casts a vote should have a vague connection to the place in which his or her vote will determine the services, environment and future of the residents. What a revolutionary concession—we have missed an opportunity for an Eisenstein film following on from "The Battleship Potemkin".

The second concession is the requirement that the persons appointed as voters must reflect the composition of the work force. On that is based the argument in favour of supporting the carry-over, as it is a breakthrough that the City corporation appears to have accepted some elements of equal opportunities within the Bill. There is a view that, even if the corporation would never have accepted universal suffrage, we might have been able to make an amendment to the Bill that allowed the business vote to be based on a ballot of the work force of the businesses, thereby enfranchising the workers who spend their days in the City creating the wealth that the City corporation throws about so blatantly. However, such an amendment was rejected and there are to be no votes for workers, so there is no rational basis for carrying over the Bill in the interests of workers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Once again, I remind the hon. Gentleman to be careful to stay in order. We are debating the carry-over motion, not details of the Bill.

Mr. McDonnell: With the greatest respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is difficult not to explore the details of the justification for the carry-over. However, I assure you that, as usual, I will take your advice.

It is claimed that, under the proposal, workers will be somehow enfranchised not because they will be granted a vote, but because nominations by business will reflect the work force. That is no reason for the workers to beat on the doors of the Chamber, urging for the Bill to be carried over. How can there be a carry-over when there is no justification for that course of action?

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Has the hon. Gentleman noticed that the arrangements in this Bill are similar to those in the so-called functional constituencies in Hong Kong, which were roundly condemned by the British Government and many others as being totally undemocratic? They were devised by the Chinese Government as a way of avoiding universal franchise in Hong Kong. I wonder why such measures are considered suitable for London.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The situation in Hong Kong is not relevant to this carry-over motion.

Mr. McDonnell: I remind hon. Members that it is dangerous to criticise the Chinese Government in this society. I move on.

A third concession is that the Bill's promoters will be required to report to the Secretary of State on the workings of the provisions of the legislation within five years. The hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who chaired the Opposed Private Bill Committee that considered the Bill—he has now left the Chamber—believed that this was a critical concession that would allow the House to return later to debate the reform of the City corporation. That is an important point upon which to base a vote in favour of the carry-over motion this evening.

We should note, however, that the Bill does not allow the House to launch a full-scale review of the City corporation and does not provide an opportunity to plan further democratic reform as the Chairman and members of the Opposed Private Bill Committee honestly

[Mr. McDonnell]

envisaged. The proposed report would be narrow and undefined: it would be a review of the workings not of the City corporation, but of the Bill. For example, the Bill does not refer to enfranchising workers in the City, to increasing weighting for residents' votes or offering residents further protection. On that basis, the support that the Committee Chairman gave to the City corporation's undertaking in this clause is not a reason for backing the carry-over motion.

Outside that provision, is there potential for further democratic reform? There is no such potential in the Bill, so the reporting mechanism in the legislation does not justify its carry over as part of a future democratic reform process. In fact, if carried over, the Bill will stifle any drive for reform. Apart from the Bill, the argument for carry-over is based on the undertakings of a supposed wider package of reforming measures—which I believe are derisory sops and an insult to the House.

The measures include changes in boundaries, protection of the proportion of residential members elected, electors and members, and internal reviews that are not subject to supervision by the local government boundary commission, which oversees every other local authority. There is an undertaking that nominations from a qualifying body will be signed by an authorised and identified officer and that ward lists to identify qualifying bodies will be published. Those undertakings, which were given by the promoters and are not in the Bill, are designed to protect the status quo: they do not improve the position of residents or the democratic process of the City corporation. In some cases, they introduce basic standards of electoral administration that were put in place in the rest of the country a century ago. Should we be grateful for those undertakings and march through the Lobby tonight to vote to carry the Bill forward?

The key point is that those undertakings do not depend upon the passage of the Bill. If those improvements should be made—they do not require legislation, as the promoters suggest—I urge the City corporation to get on with them. The reforms can be introduced even if the Bill is not carried over.

Paragraph 4 of the statement from the Bill's promoters says that the legislation's provisions will be extended to include a wider business interest. I understand the argument—which has been made by Opposition Members—that we should modernise business interests within the City corporation. If the City corporation wishes to establish a stakeholder council comprising residents, businesses and employees—the workers who create the wealth—so be it. Let it introduce such a Bill. I can appreciate at least that that would be a debatable advance on the business board dominance of the City corporation.

This Bill does not do that—nor is that its intention. We have been advised that the City corporation does not intend to introduce amendments at any carry-over phase that would enable us to establish a stakeholder structure. The Bill's objective is to embed the power of business and wealth in this crevice of our political system into the next millennium. Worse still, it extends the right to buy votes. This is the last rotten borough. It should have been dealt with by past Labour Governments, but they lost their nerve—as I regret this Government are doing.

Although the Government have stated that the vote on the Bill is unwhipped, we know that they have indicated forcefully through their Whips that they wish the Bill to proceed. The Government send Ministers to the House to defend that bastion of privilege. In the week that the Government have moved a step closer to abolishing the privilege of the unelected House of Lords, they seek to bolster and secure the unelected power of the City corporation. Worse still—this is a strong argument for hon. Members who represent London constituencies—under the Greater London Authority Bill, which we are to discuss on Thursday, the Government will give the unelected business-appointed free masonry of the City corporation the right to be treated as the equivalent of any London borough in determining general policies for London with the newly elected mayor and the strategic authority for London. It means that the grotesquely undemocratic, deformed City corporation will have a say in the policies of my city and my constituency in areas such as transport, planning, the environment, policing and so on.

Worse still, the City corporation refuses to pay its way by funding the strategic policies needed to provide a new start for London. It refuses to open its books to public scrutiny. Another argument for not carrying over the Bill is the City corporation's continuing refusal to inform us of the billions of pounds in its City cash account or to amend the Bill to allow public scrutiny of that account. There is no point carrying over the Bill and introducing this concoction of supposed democratic reforms unless we can see the cash.

It is argued that we have opposed the Bill and called for democratic reform of the City corporation and its finances because we are seeking to blackmail the corporation into spending more money in London. I suppose we are doing that: we are trying to open the books of the City corporation and to ensure that they are accountable to the City of London overall. Without democratic reform of the City corporation, the City will never pull its weight in supporting our capital. It will remain the self-interested, isolated dining club that it has been for the past century.

Therefore, it falls to those of us who are democrats to throw out this Bill tonight by refusing the carry-over and demanding a real reform Bill. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) asked me to meet City corporation representatives, and I am keen to do so. I will be delighted to lead a delegation from the House to assist in drafting a new reform Bill. Someone in my party stated recently that our battle is with the forces of conservatism. We are up against those forces in this Bill. These are not insecure teachers, council workers, air traffic controllers or London Underground staff, but the real forces of conservatism. Yet we are conspiring to create a smokescreen of reform that allows those forces of conservatism to continue their entrenched affront to democracy into another millennium. The Bill is trivial, but significant; meaningless, yet immensely symbolic. In two weeks, we shall have major debates on welfare reform, asylum issues, Lords reform and the new government of London. This Bill pales into trivia when compared to them. The sight of a reforming Labour Government supporting the last bastion of political corruption and privilege in the local government system demeans us all. Supporting the carry-over of this Bill means that we would deny the right to vote to 250,000 workers who create the wealth of the City.

I shall vote against the motion tonight, but I give a warning. If it is accepted and the Bill returns in the next Session, I, along with many colleagues, will continue to bombard it with amendments in a war of attrition to ensure that some democratic advance is achieved during that process. Someone once said, "Set our people free". We shall eventually set the City free from this type of political corruption.

7.50 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) and I oppose the carry-over of the Bill to the next Session. As he said, the Government have told us that there is no time for other important measures and I am sure that the same will be said in the next Session. For example, fox hunting has not been tackled because Parliament has not had sufficient time to do so.

Why should this Bill be carried over? We all know that, if public Bills are not enacted before the end of a Session, they fall. Indeed, Government Whips are in a muck sweat about the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, the Immigration and Asylum Bill and the House of Lords Bill. They are desperate—to the extent that they may have to play ping-pong with the other place—to get them through all their stages before the end of the Session. Why should this private Bill receive special privilege?

Sir Peter Emery: There is a procedural explanation. The Government have the right, on any of their public Bills, to introduce a guillotine and to force a Bill through the House in whatever time scale they wish. *[Interruption.]* That procedure is not available for a private Bill raised by a private corporation. Therefore, when a corporation has gone to the expense and everything else to carry it through, it should be allowed the opportunity of ensuring that the Bill can be properly considered—and, if necessary, defeated—on Third Reading. A private Bill should be able at least to reach that stage.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) reminds me that the Conservatives introduced the guillotine procedure and used it many times in government. I do not understand why a private Bill should be treated differently from a public Bill. The existence of the guillotine procedure does not mean that private Bills should receive special treatment.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wanted to convey to my hon. Friend the fact that, in the time that I have been a Member, there were no carry-over motions for many years until the Tory Government backed private measures to widen access to the ports around the coasts of Britain, so that they could bring in more imported coal and shut the pits. Hey presto, in the past 18 years, along came a Tory Government who said that they wanted to carry through such measures for the ports and they introduced a carry-over motion to enable them to do so. That is what is happening today. The example was set by the previous Government, and this Government have picked up the same cudgel.

Mr. Cohen: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's explanation.

If the rules mean that there is no carry-over for public Bills, there should not be special treatment for private Bills. The Bills of Back Benchers do not receive special treatment—the guillotine cannot be applied to them—so the argument of the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) falls flat.

Cost is another reason against the carry-over. The estimates in a House of Commons Commission report show—the figures do not take account of the estimated expenditure on Portcullis House—that the costs of running this House will amount to £213 million next year. I have done a calculation based on the 157 sitting days in the Session, and worked out that the cost is about £1.36 million a sitting day. This debate is taking up half a sitting day, so that represents a cost of about £680,000 if we take into account all the costs associated with the running of the House. This Bill has already been debated a couple of times, which means that it has received a couple of millions pounds' worth of parliamentary time. I do not see why it should receive another £1 million worth of time in the next Session.

The carry-over is all about special pleading and special treatment for the City of London. No City Bill has been rejected by Parliament for hundreds of year or since the mists of time. We should therefore assume that the City can get away with virtually anything, however antiquated, undemocratic and unreasonable that may be. The Bill is not worthy of a carry-over.

This Labour Government are proud of their modernisation agenda. This Bill, even as amended in Committee, cannot possibly be regarded as modernising. Even the Earl of Burford would be happy with it. The City remains a rarefied mixture of feudalism and business privilege.

Other business centres are developing and some will be more powerful than the City in the future. One example is docklands in London. Businesses there are potentially much more powerful than the residents who live in the area. Are those residents' democratic rights to be pushed aside following the precedent that the City corporation continues to set, which is further enshrined in the Bill?

The Bill is deeply flawed in other ways. The statement of the Bill's promoters says that

"the boundaries of residential wards . . . will be reviewed to protect their proportion on the Court of Common Council".

That provision does not appear in the Bill itself. However, residents can easily be outvoted by businesses under the system that is proposed. It is a convoluted voting scale. I shall not go into all the details in the promoters' statement, but, if one buys a shed in the City of London with a rateable value of £200 or more, one can have a vote.

The promoters' statement adds that the number of persons who may be appointed by a qualifying body to vote increases with rateable value. The system is convoluted and complicated. The need to have property rights to be able to vote does not constitute one person, one vote. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington pointed out, it is not a system of universal suffrage. There will be 100 common councillors and 25 aldermen on the Court of Common Council.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman heard me tell the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

(Mr. McDonnell) that we are discussing the carry-over motion. The details of the Bill have nothing to do with tonight's proceedings.

Mr. Cohen: I appreciate that point and take it on board, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was merely making the point that the Bill is not worthy of the carry-over and the extra expenditure that I mentioned earlier.

I shall not dwell on the point about the membership of the Court of Common Council, only to say that the Greater London Authority will have only 25 members for the whole of the rest of London. Why does the City corporation have to be so out of proportion? Again, it is an example of the special treatment that it is receiving and of which the carry-over motion is a part.

The promoters' statement also refers to the 250,000 commuters who come to the City every day. They suggest that that is a reason for the corporation to receive special treatment. It implied that they would have a say in the City corporation's new arrangements. If they are a factor in the special arrangements, why are not they all put on a register and given individual votes? Why are just the property-owning bosses of those commuters to have the vote? I thought that we had long ago realised that bosses do not automatically speak for their employees. People have a vote where they live, not where they travel to. Allowing the latter is a recipe for chaos.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): The hon. Members for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) and for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) have been rich in criticism of the City, but if the Bill falls, the status quo prevails. In the circumstances, does the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead expect the Government to introduce a Government Bill, in Government time, to reform the City? Does he want the status quo to prevail?

Mr. Cohen: I shall describe the change that I want later in my speech. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman because once the change occurred, the City of London would be protected from further reform for the indefinite future, and be in a stronger position to continue that mix of feudalism and business privilege to which I referred. It would be better if the Bill failed, and that is why I am arguing that it should not be carried over.

The vast majority of people in the financial and business community in the City of London are indifferent to the running of corporation affairs. They are interested in national economics and politics—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is a pity that the Deputy Speaker must keep intervening. Once again, the hon. Member is straying from the business before us.

Mr. Cohen: In deference to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not pursue the point further.

The key point is the special pleading and the privilege that the City is to enjoy as a result of the motion. I do not think that the House should grant that. Another reason is that we would end up with a problem of two mayors of London. That would be an anomaly, and could make London look daft. Two mayors could easily hinder each other.

I would rather that the Bill failed than be carried over eventually to strengthen the City. The City corporation covers too small an area to be an authority in its own right; everyone really knows that it should be integrated in the Greater London Authority. It is a constitutional anomaly that, for the main part, has outlived its usefulness.

I do not say that the corporation does not do some good work in London, as I mentioned in debates on earlier stages of the Bill. The one proviso in my argument is its management of open land.

Mr. Skinner: I am intrigued; I wonder what Prince Charles thinks about the carry-over motion? He comments on almost everything, but I have not heard anything on this matter. I assume that he is in favour of it.

Mr. Cohen: I cannot comment on that. Prince Charles is probably too busy fox hunting to have a view on the Bill.

Mr. McDonnell: He is with us.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend says that he is with us, so we will forgive him on this point.

The corporation does good work in its management of open land, such as Epping forest, but the capital deserves an independent London-wide environmental green land trust, which does not have to be the corporation's responsibility. The corporation has such a role by accident of history—it bought much of its land with its vast funds. Despite the fact that many areas of London are heavily urbanised and road polluted, they do not receive any support from the corporation for an ameliorating green land policy. I could give examples of that in my constituency, where the M11 is being built—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I plead with the hon. Member. The House should not be hearing about the corporation itself. We are debating just the carry-over motion.

Mr. Cohen: I apologise; it is very difficult sometimes not to stray.

I return to the point that the City wants special treatment from the House. It wants all that money to be spent on it, but will not dip into its own pocket for the rest of London. That is at the heart of what I am trying to say.

Mr. Skinner: Is my hon. Friend trying to tell me that this is a carry-over motion, and a Bill for the few and not the many?

Mr. Cohen: That is extremely well put, but I had better not go further down that road.

City chiefs know that the corporation could and should do much more about green and open space in London, and that it does not run a comprehensive environmental green and open space policy for the capital, which is what is needed. Many would say that such a role is for the new

mayor of London. Why, then, is the City even involved? The corporation hinders such a policy because it holds the main purse strings—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is straying from the subject again, but he promised me that he would try not to do so.

Mr. Cohen: I shall not stray again. In deference to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have cut vast swathes of my prepared speech.

Even London businesses contribute £1.2 billion a year to the rest of the country through national non-domestic rates. The City speaks up for London businesses—or claims to do so—yet it is impotent in preventing all that money flowing out of London and in protecting business interests in London. It certainly does not put up its own money for that. Therefore, given the City's current activities, it does not deserve a special carry-over motion.

At an earlier stage in the Bill's progress, it was backed by the then Minister for London and Construction, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning. Even today, I suspect that Ministers will troop through the Aye Lobby, as they did previously—wasting their time on a Bill that is not worthy.

What did my hon. Friend the Minister get from the City for committing the support of all those Ministers? The changes to the Bill do not add up to a moment's modernisation. Hereditary peers are about as modern as the corporation of London will be following the passage of this Bill. Ministers have been selling London short by the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Minister originally sought to be a candidate for the mayor of London. He is now a campaign manager for one of the candidates, but when it came to getting a deal for London and putting the squeeze on the City, for all the Government backing, he slunk away, losing the opportunity. His policy on the Bill does not inspire hope in Londoners that those in the capital's top jobs—the mayor and the Minister responsible for London—will fight hard enough on their behalf if it does not suit them or if they prefer a cosy deal with business men and dignitaries in the corporation of London. By supporting the Bill, the Government and the Minister responsible for London are sending an appalling message. We should be putting the squeeze on the City, so that, with all its vast wealth, it does a lot more for the environment and the businesses of London, as it should. I—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Robert Syms.

8.10 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I shall speak briefly in support of the motion.

I served on the Opposed Private Bills Committee, which considered a fair amount of evidence. The Labour party had obviously changed its position on the City of London, but the incoming Government were nevertheless subject to an expectation that there would be reforms in the City, as the franchise was being severely criticised from all directions, and it was felt that improvement was needed.

In evidence, Mr. Tom Simmons, the clerk of the City of London, said that the City initially hoped and expected that the Government might encompass reform proposals within a Government Bill. Had that happened, there would have been no need for the City to promote a private Bill. However, the Government—no doubt because of their other priorities and because of all the difficulties with the Greater London Authority—did not wish to become involved in promoting a change to the franchise in the City. Despite that, there was still an expectation of reform and modernisation—that over-used word—so the City felt that it had to come up with proposals speedily to tackle the problem of the franchise to enable it to survive as an independent institution promoting what we probably all agree is a very important asset for the nation, and creating very many jobs in many other parts of London.

I support the carry-over motion precisely because the City was obliged to introduce a private Bill. The City is in a difficult position. Residents of the City and many businesses have been consulted on the new system. Considerable expense has been incurred in that consultation and in the promotion of the Bill. Because the City cannot impose a guillotine, it does not seem unreasonable that the Bill should be carried over.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will explain to me how he can possibly justify the carry-over of a Bill which would normally fall—as this Bill undoubtedly should—and which, in clause 3(1)(c), contains a provision that allows a person to appoint someone else to vote. That is not democratic, no matter how one looks at it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not in the Chamber when I made it clear that we are debating the carry-over motion, not the details of the Bill. Mr. Robert Syms.

Mr. Bermingham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Surely the justification for carry-over is normally to be found in the Bill itself, enabling one to question its anomalies and undemocratic nature and to ask right hon. or hon. Gentlemen—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. All I would say is, "Surely not." The situation is clear: we are debating the carry-over motion. That, rather than the detail of the Bill, is what is on the Order Paper. *[Interruption.]* If the carry-over motion is passed, all the details and all the argument can be put forward again.

Mr. Syms: No doubt, if the carry-over motion is passed, the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to debate these weighty issues, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Bill is not ideal. I have some concerns about it, but its proposals are an improvement on the current arrangements, and the report back, on which the Committee insisted, will at least keep the matter in the political court so that we may see whether the Bill is working in the way that the City expects it to.

8.14 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): We are delighted to see the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) in his place tonight. We are sorry not to see the Minister for Housing and Planning, whose

[Mr. Shaun Woodward]

face we have become accustomed to seeing on these occasions, but we understand that he may be busy on the telephone to constituents of Brent, East tonight.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) asks why the Bill should be carried over. The answer is that the City of London is unique, and the City needs the Bill to be carried over. We all hear the views of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, but his description of the City as a rotten borough probably tells the House little about the reality of the City and a great deal about the hon. Gentleman's deeply held convictions about those who create wealth in our city. As he says, he will launch a war of attrition to try to destroy the Bill if it is carried over, and perhaps that tells us all that we need to know about his objections tonight. It is not reform but an ideological agenda.

Mr. Bermingham: I shall try to keep my remarks in order this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker—if I go off the track, just tell me again: I promise to be good—but will the hon. Gentleman explain how, if he has reservations about a Bill which he thinks is a bad Bill, he can get up and justify carrying it over? Why should a bad Bill be carried over when it is much easier to get rid of it and start again?

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Gentleman asks me whether I think that the Bill is a bad Bill. It may not be perfect, but I do not believe that it is a bad Bill.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington had much to say against the Bill, but almost nothing he said dealt with the carry-over motion.

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) lamented the lack of parliamentary time. We echo those sentiments. We are concerned about the way in which the Government are managing the business of the House at the moment. The latest suggestion, which is that they intend to guillotine Thursday's debate of the Greater London Authority Bill, is an outrage: Londoners will note that the Government are doing that even though we shall be debating more than 800 Government amendments added to the Bill since it left the House.

Mr. Bermingham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What have Thursday and the GLA got to do with the carry-over motion? You ruled against me; I am now asking you to rule against the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. So far, the hon. Gentleman has been in good order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Had it been otherwise, I would have said so.

Mr. Woodward: As always, Mr. Deputy Speaker, your words are words of wisdom, and sagaciously considered.

The City of London is indeed unique—unique in its national role, in its size, its population, its local finance, its responsibilities, its work in the arts and its charitable work. The City is unique, too, in having an electoral system that was unaffected when, in 1969, the non-residential vote was abolished for local government elections.

The Home Secretary of the time—now Lord Callaghan—said of retaining the City's non-residential franchise, with its "very small resident population" and its "heavy local government responsibilities", that the City of London constituted a quite "special and exceptional case." The special and exceptional case continues to be a reason for us to recognise that the Bill should be carried over.

For those reasons alone, the Bill, and the work and parliamentary time that went into creating it, should not be wasted: it should be carried over.

The City of London is one of the world's most important international financial centres, contributing 10 per cent. of this country's gross domestic product. The signal that we send tonight in carrying over the Bill is an important signal to the City. For the people who live and work in the City, too, it is important that we carry over the Bill. The Bill may represent at the moment only 6,000 residents, but the City's housing stock, represented largely by the Barbican, Golden Lane and Mansell Street council estates, means that it has one of the highest densities of population in Europe. The Bill matters to those people and to the more than 250,000 people who commute to the City every day. It is, and remains, an exceptional situation.

We need to make progress on the Bill, because the House should demonstrate that it recognises the contribution that the City makes to our national economy and our life. The City's role in culture, environment and charities is vital, not only within the square mile but outside it. That is why we are giving our support to carry this private Bill over. It provides for a special franchise for this special case and permits exceptions to the norm for a municipality that is unique.

Exceptionally, the community of the City of London consists, in large part, of its businesses. That is why, in addition to the usual universal franchise for residents, the vote will be extended to non-residents. If the franchise is not updated, the business interests of the City will be represented by an increasingly anachronistic, unrepresentative body of sole traders and partnerships, and it surely cannot be the wish of the House to perpetuate such a state.

The Opposition are fully committed to strengthening communities. We want to give those who live and work in that exceptional space control of their local government. In the unique case of the City of London, the reform will go a long way to achieving fairer representation.

The Conservative party believes in the role of the City, both in London and in the country. The City works well for London. It will work even better with the Bill, which is why the Bill should be carried over. We should not endanger, even in the smallest way, the continued international pre-eminence of the City by preventing the Bill from being carried over.

I accept that some Labour Members have honourable objections to the Bill. We disagree with them, and feel that in most cases their objections to the carry-over motion are fuelled by a desire not to improve the Bill but to destroy it—not to produce fairer representation and better government, but effectively to leave the status quo in place.

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead spoke of the money being expended by Parliament in debating the carry-over. The waste of money would surely be not in debating the motion, but in losing the Bill and failing to carry it over.

The City is unique. Its geographical footprint may be tiny, but its real footprint covers many aspects of London life and, in financial terms, the globe. We believe that

reform is necessary and we are keen for progress on it, but reform will not come if the Bill fails to be carried over tonight. We urge the House to support the motion.

8.22 pm

Mr. Phil Sawford (Kettering): I served on the Committee that considered the Bill—an experience that I welcomed, as it was extremely educational. I learned a great deal, after my 20 years in local government. I learned of wards that had no electors. I heard of councillors who were never subjected to elections. I emerged from the Committee enlightened by the experience.

I welcome the opportunity tonight to discuss the carry-over motion. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) and others have advanced numerous serious arguments about the Bill. It was a private Bill. The Committee felt constrained by the terms of such a Bill. We had to search the House to find Committee Clerks and advisers who could remember the last private Bill. I was told that the last one was a hybrid Bill on the channel tunnel, so long was it since we considered a private Bill.

We were told that under the terms of a private Bill, there were strict limitations on what we could propose and the amendments that we could table. Within those constraints and in a quasi-judicial forum, it was difficult to pursue any kind of democratic agenda or procedures to widen the terms of the Bill. Although the representatives of the City had come with good intentions and although they were motivated to move forward, open up the franchise and encourage businesses in the City to take a closer interest in the affairs of the City, even they realised as the debate progressed that they had not gone far enough.

Mr. David Heath: From his experience on the Committee, can the hon. Gentleman tell me why a Government who purport to be a reforming Government could not introduce reform of the City of London in a local government Bill?

Mr. Sawford: I must take care how I respond to that. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. As I understand it, the City of London corporation predates Parliament. Therefore Parliament does not have the power to dictate terms to the City of London. We do not have the legislative power to make such changes.

Mr. Skinner: Is my hon. Friend saying that the City of London has had more carry-over motions than we have had?

Mr. Sawford: The City has been carrying over for more than 1,000 years.

The Committee understood that its powers were strictly limited. The question this evening is whether the debate should continue. It is suggested by the Opposition that if we do not carry over the Bill, we accept the status quo. That is not necessarily so. Clear signals can go from the Chamber that many of us do not accept the status quo.

If we support the carry-over motion, do we not as a Parliament endorse the status quo, with modest amendments? That is the effect of continuing the debate and agreeing the carry-over. We are endorsing those modest reforms, the inadequacies and undemocratic nature of which have been exposed by hon. Members, who have rightly been called to order by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we are not discussing the merits of the Bill.

Some of the motion's shortcomings have been exposed. If we vote against it, we can invite Ministers, representatives of the City of London, the corporation and even the odd Back Bencher—possibly my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington—to get round the table for further discussion of the reform of the City.

Perhaps we can invite the City corporation to produce another Bill that truly reforms the City of London. That, I sense, is what many hon. Members, as democrats, want. I am not using that as a term of abuse; I mean that we are democratically elected representatives.

I do not doubt the motives of the City of London. Its representatives want to change and are looking for a way forward. However, the Bill needs closer scrutiny and a broader approach. It must be subject to wider public debate. What we need for the City of London is an institution for the next millennium, not the continuation of an institution that served the last millennium.

Mr. Bermingham: My hon. Friend is rich and generous in his words. Is not "modernise" the word that he is missing?

Mr. Sawford: I was about to move on to that. We need to look for progress, and the next word is "modernise". I confess that I am not a moderniser per se, but we need to further our democratic institutions. I fought the election to the House on the future, not the past; the many not the few—all that is still on my pager—and the Bill is about the future, not the past; the many, not the few.

I do not believe that the Bill is consistent with the values and principles of the House of Commons. It is a privilege to be part of this process, to be a Member of the House and to fight for those values and principles in which the people who voted for me believe. The Bill is not consistent with that. It is time for the House, as a democratic institution, to look for a way forward. The City, the Government and the Chamber may have painted themselves into a corner. The Bill, if carried over, will take a tremendous amount of Parliament's time. Amendment on amendment will be tabled. Phrases such as "war of attrition" have been mentioned. People with strong views are strongly opposed to the Bill.

Perhaps we can get ourselves out of that corner this evening. It might not find favour with the Government to suggest it, but I invite my hon. Friends and all hon. Members to get us out of the position in which we find ourselves by voting against the carry-over. Then we could look for genuine reform and a genuine way out of the corner and we could have further discussions and further debate. The City could review the whole issue and bring back a better Bill with a better chance of being passed by the House which would not face the opposition that this Bill will face—no matter whether it is carried over or how many nights we spend on it. I invite Members of the House to vote against a carry-over. Let us try to move the agenda on with a better, more reforming Bill—a Bill for the new millennium.

8.31 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): No Member of the House thinks that the proposals on the table will change the City of London from an old-fashioned, out-of-date local government structure into a modern, up-to-date one. I have heard no argument from either side of the Chamber that this is the Bill that ought to be before us. We debated that issue on Second Reading.

The Bill is not whipped by the Liberal Democrats and my colleagues voted both for and against Second Reading on 14 July. Tonight we are debating whether the Bill should be carried over to the next Session. I shall make three brief points about that.

The point was well made earlier that Parliament has mechanisms, whether we like them or not, for getting Government business through in a Session. We have often debated whether we should have mechanisms for carrying over public legislation from one Session to another—for example, to deal with a filibuster undertaken by a Member of Parliament against the will of 657 other Members.

That is one debate. Private Bills have the disadvantage that, although we allow them, whether they are given time depends on an obscure system whereby the Chairman of Ways and Means allocates time under Standing Orders providing for a certain amount of private Bill time each year. Forget for a second the issue of what Bill is being debated; my colleagues and I believe it is nonsense that a Bill that might have huge merit could receive only limited time and have to go back to the beginning of the process of getting it through the House at the start of the following year.

I understand the argument. It could be said that if public Bills cannot get through the House in a year, nor should private Bills, but the mechanism for getting public Bills through the process is different from that used for private Bills. Therefore there is no logic to having the same rules for private Bills. We take the view that there should be a facility to carry a private Bill over from one Session to another. That applies irrespective of the Bill; as a result, it is proper that a motion concerning whether we want to carry the Bill over should be tabled.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman remember, as I do, the Ginns and Gutteridge, Leicester (Crematorium) Bill, which Lord Janner, who is now in the other place, fought tenaciously year in, year out? An enormous amount of parliamentary time was wasted on a bad Bill. Is he suggesting that as much parliamentary time should be wasted on another bad Bill when it could be taken away and made into a good one?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has asked two questions. The first was whether I remembered the Leicester crematorium Bill and the answer is: not very clearly. It is not one of the great recollections of my political career. The second question was whether we have a system that allows us to spend a lot of time next year and the year after on a private Bill which none of us would like, or whether we should cut it off tonight and—the hon. Gentleman cannot argue that it is precluded—allow a similar Bill to be reintroduced in November. As well as being a better Bill, it could be a similar Bill.

The hon. Gentleman's argument is flawed, because saying that there should be no carry-over does not preclude the promoters of the Bill—in this case the City of London corporation—coming to this place with an identical or similar Bill to the Bill before us. We therefore would not stop the promoters promoting similar legislation simply by saying that there will be no carry-over. If we could do that, there would be a different debate.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we set a precedent by throwing out a bad Bill, we would send a message to the promoters of private Bills that they either take into account the will of the House or they cannot come back with other, similar Bills?

Mr. Hughes: I understand that point. The problem is that we do not have the Standing Orders to do that. If our rules allowed us to, and if we threw out a Bill one Session and it was brought it back the next, to ensure that the promoters got it no further, we could deal with that problem. However, we cannot. Given that the date for the introduction of private Bills is November each year, unless we do something in the remaining days of this Session, or in the first few days of the next Session, all the private Bills that do not get through this Session will be presented to us again.

If what the hon. Gentleman wants could happen, we would not be having this debate. That, however, is not the case. Should we then allow this debate to continue, or should we cut off the Bill now? The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) argued that we should not allow the debate to continue because it is a way of stopping the Bill completely. Let me make my position clear. Hon. Members know my position because we had an around-the-houses on it earlier in the year.

This is not the Bill that should be coming from the City. We should have before us a Bill that gives a proper representative structure to the City. The City has had plenty of time in which to draft such a Bill. The House is sending lots of messages—they are coded from some quarters and less coded from others—that the City must do better. My preference is that, in November, the City should come back with a Bill that would find favour in the House. Once the date for the promotion of private Bills has arrived, I should like to see a new Bill tabled by the City of London corporation.

I made it clear on Second Reading that I hoped that the City would go away and come back with a better Bill. Those of my colleagues who voted for this Bill's Second Reading, as I did, on the basis that the proposal, however flawed, was better than the present system, have had to argue strongly with other colleagues who say that, although the proposal is better, it is indefensible. Collectively, therefore, we have no great enthusiasm for the Bill.

Mr. Bermingham: Surely what the hon. Gentleman says proves the point that I seek to make. If we send an unequivocal message from the House tonight that this is a bad Bill, that we do not like it, and that the City of London corporation should come back with a new Bill that takes into account what the House has said, we will have set a precedent. That is all we seek to do.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that. If I were confident that the Government were not, effectively, whipping the Bill, and if my colleagues had been confident from the

beginning that there would be a truly free vote, the hon. Gentleman's argument would have found much more favour and the Bill probably would not have proceeded. The Bill proceeded only because, as is evidenced from the Division records, a significant number of Government Members voted for it, not having attended the debate. I understand that—it happens all the time, but it need not and should not happen. Private Bills should not be whipped. The sooner private Bills are treated as truly private Bills, the better we can do our job as legislators.

Mr. Skinner: In 1976, the Eastbourne Harbour Bill was presented by Ian Gow, who later became the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Margaret Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. He lost the Bill because we talked until about a quarter to nine and we allowed the Tories, who had all come out of the woodwork, to think that the vote would be at 10 o'clock. I shut up after about 70 minutes, and we called a Division. They did not have the 40 people necessary, so we beat them.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) should remember that private Bills come back almost exactly the same. There is no question about that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. This is an extremely long intervention.

Mr. Skinner: I am trying to put the hon. Gentleman on the straight and narrow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should conclude his intervention.

Mr. Skinner: When there was a change of Government, the Prime Minister decided that she would get the Eastbourne Harbour Bill through for Ian Gow, her Parliamentary Private Secretary, the then hon. Member for Eastbourne. It was brought back, and she packed the House solid all night until 6 o'clock in the morning against the opposition of a few of us. The net result was that it got through, even though it was roughly the same Bill.

Mr. Hughes: I was not in the House in 1976, but I have been here for enough of these debates to know exactly what the hon. Gentleman means. He bears out my point that Governments often deliver private Bills if there is support for them somewhere in the Government. We understand that, but it should not be so, because there is no point in private Bills at all if they are managed in that way.

I shall vote for the carry-over, although some of my hon. Friends will not. We shall see what happens. I have a concern that I shall express, even though some people are worried about my doing so. There will be a variety of private Bills next year, as there are every year, although there are far fewer than there used to be. This private Bill must take its place with all the other private Bills, and no priority should be given to any of them.

I have never understood how it is decided which private Bills are taken and in what order. Interestingly, it would be a democratic reform of our procedures if Parliament, not the Chairman of Ways and Means, decided the order in which it took the private Bills to fill the slots available.

Mr. McDonnell: I do not want to pin the hon. Gentleman down, but perhaps he should reflect on the logic of his argument. He is arguing that this is a bad Bill, but he is willing to support its carry-over knowing that it may squeeze out good Bills. He says that Parliament should determine the order in which private Bills are taken, although he argued with my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) that we do not have the power to do that—and he is still willing to vote for the carry-over. Not only is he using confused logic, but he is supporting the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill, which does nothing to improve the democratic processes of the City of London corporation. In fact, it would confirm the corporation in its undemocratic ways for years to come.

Mr. Hughes: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. We debated that issue on Second Reading. I had to make a judgment as to whether the Bill would leave the City, its government and, above all, its people and residents with a more democratic or less democratic structure. The clear evidence of the consultation process in the City is that the majority of people who have responded prefer the Bill to the status quo. Some people oppose it: I do not pretend that the consultation was perfect. On that basis and not on any other, I believe that it is better to have the Bill, strange improvement though it be, than the status quo.

I do not defend the Bill. I would not have proposed it, and I am not happy about it. However, I shall vote for a system that is clearly less archaic than the present one. My hon. Friends may do otherwise. We shall proceed to vote on whether the Bill should be carried over. If it is carried over, a final warning should be given to the City. If it is not to have the same battle next year as it has had this year, it would be better if it came up with an improved Bill. It is in the corporation's own hands, and if it does not do that, it knows the difficulty it may have in getting this Bill through the House next year.

8.45 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I shall be brief, as I made a number of observations during our earlier discussions on the Bill. I have a professional connection, and in that respect I declare an interest as a member of chambers in the Temple who—depending on whether the clerk remembers to register it—has, or does not have, a vote in the elections that we are discussing. Those elections take place in what is very much a pocket ward, and that is something of which I thoroughly disapprove.

I do not want to cause a conflict between you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and your predecessor in the Chair. I do not propose to elaborate on why I consider clause 3(1)(c) so appalling, or to press the Minister in that regard.

Each time I have contributed to the debate, I have tried to explain that when a Bill is bad, it is best to stop that Bill. When a Bill is bad, why carry it over? Will it really be improved? The answer is no. What we will end up with is a Bill that takes up parliamentary time in the following year—a good deal of parliamentary time, because many of us will feel obliged to oppose it line by line, thus slowing the process. If the City really wants to modernise and to enter the 21st century with the rest of us, it has the opportunity to re-word arrangements for the City franchise, so that we can have a democratic City.

I am not against the City of London; quite the contrary. I think that it is a wonderful institution, which has a part to play in our society. But at least let it be democratic: let

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

not the idea of appointment appear. Appointment is not a good thing in a democracy. There should be elections, and democratic elections at that.

I am watching the Minister carefully. He is young and unproven as yet, not tested by the fire of this place. I warn him that a lot of old hands here know that, time and again, the City has missed the golden opportunity to enter the 21st century with the rest of us. The City needs to recast this Bill. If we lose the vote and the Bill is carried over, I shall expect the City to sit down and ask itself three questions. First, it must ask how it can appear democratic. Secondly, it must ask how it can reflect the interests of its real voters, the residents, which are paramount in business terms. I say that openly, as one who, in a very minor way, has a business interest as a barrister in chambers that contain many persons. Thirdly, the City must ask how it can act in a way that will present an example to other cities in this land that are moving steadily towards the single-mayor approach.

It will be necessary to marry two elements. We will have a London mayor, who will be elected, and an assembly or council, and the two will have to work hand in hand. What a contrast; what a disgrace.

This is a bad Bill which should not be carried over. I await the Minister's speech with interest, and ask him to accept that if I intervene—with his permission—my intentions are honourable, friendly and educative. But I can kick.

8.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): What an introduction to my brief speech!

I am grateful for this opportunity to give the House a short explanation of the Government's support for the carry-over motion, which I know will not be wholeheartedly welcomed by a number of my hon. Friends. Although this is not a Government Bill, it stems from the Government's wish to see reform in the City of London, and, in particular, reform and modernisation of its electoral arrangements, structures and participatory procedures.

I think most of us will accept that some of the City's customs and practices are archaic and obscure. They do not contribute to good, effective and accountable local government in the City. However, the corporation has recognised that, and the Bill is part of its response to the challenge to modernise.

The Government support continued consideration of the Bill under the motion because we welcome the fact that the City is beginning to face up to the need to put its governance on a more modern footing. We believe that the proposals are a step in the right direction.

Mr. McDonnell: If the proposals are the first step, could my hon. Friend describe the second step?

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend is fully aware that the Bill, as amended, permits a review at the end of five years. Nothing in the Bill precludes further reform. Indeed, it is arguable that its enactment is more likely to expedite such reform.

Mr. McDonnell: On that point, what is the reform that the Government would like as part of the review? What is the next step in the democratic process? Is it universal suffrage?

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend must not tempt me down the path of detailed comment on a Bill that is, after all, not a Government measure, but I beg him to reflect on the following aspect—

Mr. Bermingham: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hill: Allow me to answer one of my hon. Friends before going on to another.

I invite my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) to reflect on the following fact when he considers the future. The current electorate in the City of London stands at 20,000. Under the Bill, the electorate will be 40,000.

Mr. McDonnell: Businesses.

Mr. Hill: Not wholly businesses—if we were to restrict the franchise to the 5,000 residents in the City, that would surely be legislating for the few, not for the many.

The Bill's changes to the electoral system recognise the unique nature of the square mile and the need for an inclusive form of local governance that reflects the needs of all those who have an interest.

Mr. McDonnell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hill: Certainly, but I have to say that it is not the Government's Bill and I must not detain the House unduly by responding to my hon. Friends, however fascinating their interventions may be.

Mr. McDonnell: On that novel transformation of the principle of the few to that of the many, does that mean that the Government will introduce legislation to give the many businesses nationally the right to vote? That is the logic of my hon. Friend's argument. If we are now for the many, and that means many businesses, will that be the commitment that we give to the CBI this week?

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend knows that it is not the Government's intention to legislate for a business vote. However, I ask him again to reflect on an interesting fact: the corporate franchise that the Bill envisages is based on electoral systems that were recently introduced in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia—as we know, a country of some constitutional innovation.

The changes must include the companies and institutions that are established in the City, the workers who are employed by them and the people who live there. The reforms will both widen the franchise and protect the rights of the 5,000 plus resident voters in the City.

The carry-over motion should be supported. We believe that it is a worthwhile measure, as did the Committee that examined the Bill in detail.

Mr. Bermingham: I did not want to interrupt my hon. Friend's prepared speech too much, but perhaps he would explain one point. As it is not a Government measure, what on earth are the Government doing supporting it? If the House and the local persons involved are against it, what right have a democratic Government to try to steamroller it through in a private Bill? Government business yes; private Bills no. Perhaps he might take the opportunity to explain himself.

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend is an old enough hand in this institution to know that it is normal and appropriate—indeed, it is requisite—for the Government to express their opinion on any issue of governance that passes through the House. All that I am seeking to do is to enlighten the House on the Government's position on the matter.

Mr. David Heath: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hill: No; I do not want to give way. Although it is deeply tempting to give way, it would be wrong for me to detain the House much longer on a private Bill.

The Government believe that the Bill should be given a realistic opportunity to become law. As the Committee pointed out in its special report, there is clearly much more that the City could do to improve and modernise the way in which it is governed. The Bill, however, is a significant measure that will steer the corporation firmly in the direction of reform and modernisation.

If the Bill is not allowed to continue its progress through Parliament, the electoral arrangements in the City of London will remain unchanged; the current franchise, which is clearly unsatisfactory, will continue; and the drive for reform from within the corporation will be stifled. I do not think that anyone really wants that.

By allowing the Bill to carry over to the next Session, the House will be giving further encouragement to the City to continue the reform process. I therefore hope that the House will support the motion.

Mr. Brooke: I sense that I am engaged in a duel that will verge upon eternity with the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell), who—today, as on some previous occasions—has said some mildly disobliging things about the City corporation.

Mr. Sawford: They were much worse than that.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. As he spends more time in the House, he will become a little more familiar with my prose style.

I neutrally remark that, on earlier occasions, the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington seemed anxious to prolong the debate. I did not on those occasions assist him by countering the arguments he made. On this occasion, I am very properly prevented by the rules of this debate from responding to the things that he said today.

The hon. Gentleman and I are like ships that pass in the night, sometimes seemingly in fog. I very much hope that, perhaps in the next Session, there will be an opportunity for me to animadvert on some of his observations.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) for the kinder of his remarks on the City corporation. Although I know how the City spends its money on behalf of London as a whole, and even more widely than London, I would be ruled out of order if I were to dwell on that. I assure the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Sawford) that private Bills come very frequently to the House; I have been involved in sponsoring some of them, not least because of the nature of my constituency.

In his remarks, the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead mentioned the M11. In 1978, I promoted a Bill sponsored by the City of London to enable the M11 to pass through certain parts of Epping forest belonging to the City corporation, which the corporation saved in the 19th century. On that occasion, the great Arthur Lewis—the former Member of Parliament for Newham, whom some hon. Members in the Chamber will remember—said, and I am paraphrasing his remarks, "I do not trust the words of Government. I have always found it right to trust the word of the City of London." In that spirit, I hope that the House will give the carry-over a majority.

I was grateful to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) for his support. He and I were the only inner-London Opposition Members on the Committee considering the Greater London Authority Bill, and we got to know each other's minds even better perhaps than we might have wished. I am glad to have his support on this occasion.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington quoted, "Set the people free", which he attributed to the leader of the Labour party—[HON. MEMBERS: "No".] The hon. Gentleman alluded to the phrase, which has been used before, by the great Winston Churchill—to whom it was given by Geoffrey Crowther—when he was making a speech at a party conference in Blackpool. Sir Winston Churchill left the others who were preparing his speech and went off into his bath, and they could hear him rehearsing it. He gave several versions of the phrase, "Set the people free", emphasising different words each time. Therefore, the phrase is honoured in my party, as well—apparently—as in the Labour party.

I am not suggesting that the Prime Minister practises in his bath, but I hope that the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington and I will be allowed to continue our gentle duel in the next Parliament. Setting the people free is the process that will enable us to do so, and I hope that the House will vote for the carry-over motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 81.

Division No. 281] **[9 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*	Beith, Rt Hon A J
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*	Bercow, John
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Beresford, Sir Paul
Allan, Richard	Betts, Clive
Allen, Graham	Blears, Ms Hazel
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James	Boswell, Tim
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary	Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Atkins, Charlotte	Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*	Brake, Tom
Baker, Norman	Brazier, Julian
Bayley, Hugh	Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Beard, Nigel	Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret	Browning, Mrs Angela

Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burden, Richard
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cann, Jamie
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Dowd, Jim
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Christopher
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hain, Peter
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Hill, Keith
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Loughton, Tim
McAvoy, Thomas
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
Madel, Sir David
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Pickles, Eric
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Ryan, Ms Joan
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Spellar, John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Squire, Ms Rachel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Crispin Blunt and
Mr. Tony Baldry.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Berrington, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cawsey, Ian
Chaytor, David
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Flynn, Paul
Fyfe, Maria
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hinchliffe, David
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
McWalter, Tony
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sawford, Phil
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thompson, William
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Wareing, Robert N
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wise, Audrey
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kelvin Hopkins and
Mr. Harry Cohen.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Promoters of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the

Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

That on the fifth day on which the House sits in the next Session the Bill shall be presented to the House;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill presented in the House in the present Session;

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means;

That the Chairman of Ways and Means shall make such Amendments thereto as have been made by the committee in the present Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to be considered;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.

Beer Duty

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

9.13 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue. I am introducing the debate because of the significance of the Hook Norton brewery in my constituency. This year the brewery is celebrating 150 years of brewing beer, and it still uses the buildings that it used in the last century. Much of the original brewing equipment is still used, it is still producing first-class beer, and earlier this year, Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal opened a new business centre.

Hook Norton brewery employs 38 people, whose families have worked with it for many years, and owns 36 pubs, 12 of which are in my constituency. The names of Hook Norton's beers evoke much that is appreciated in rural England—Haymaker beer, for midsummer, Twelve Days Beer, for Christmas, and Old Hooky for all the year round. Hooky beer is renowned throughout the country.

In January the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury said in a written answer:

"Member states are free to set excise duty rates at the level they feel are appropriate to their own circumstances".—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1999; Vol. 324, c. *220.*]

How can excessively high beer tax be in the interest of UK consumers, UK jobs or our countryside?

Duty rates on beer in Britain are considerably higher—I stress that—than those in several of our fellow European states. In this country, duty on beer of 4 per cent. strength is £43.28 a hectolitre, whereas, in France, duty on beer of equivalent strength is only £8.44 per hectolitre—a staggering difference of £35. Duty is even less in Germany, and, in Spain, is only £6.36. The Government are eager to be seen as the consumer's friend, yet they are overseeing a blatant rip-off.

Pubs are obliged to have glasses that mark distinctly a full pint. Perhaps there should be a second marking on the glass, to show how much of the cost of a pint goes to the Treasury in tax—a tax level. When the single market was introduced in the European Union, a target rate of tax was set of about 8p on the price of a pint, with the aim of harmonising beer duty rates in the EU. All those EU countries whose rates were significantly above that figure have reduced their duty—with the exception of the UK, which has increased its duty rate by 13 per cent. That is wrong. Such a difference is absurd, and—for reasons that I shall give—can have only a detrimental effect on the British economy.

The high rate of duty on beer especially hurts the rural economy and is yet another Government attack on the countryside. It hurts not only the farmers, who grow the raw materials for beer, but small country pubs, which offer a sound source of village employment and are also centres of the local community.

That staggering variation in beer prices provides shoppers with a considerable incentive to purchase beer from the continent, rather than from pubs and brewers in Britain. Frenzied booze-cruise trips are especially damaging to the rural economy. Surveys show that 43 per cent. of pub visits involve journeys of less than one mile, thus country pubs, with small catchment areas,

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

suffer the most from beer bootlegging. The abolition of import allowances, as part of the single market, acts as another incentive to smugglers to bring in bootleg beer from abroad and resell it illegally in this country. It is clear that that illegal trade jeopardises the jobs of decent, hard-working people in the UK. By beer bootlegging, I mean simply taking Transit vans across to France and elsewhere in Europe to bring beer back—not for people's own consumption, but to sell it at a profit. Those bootleggers are almost running a business.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer seemed to recognise the scale of the problem, when he announced in the July 1997 Budget—the first after the general election—that beer duty required

"careful consideration this year, not least because of the impact of fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 311.]

Those are precisely the issues that cause such concern to me, my constituents and many people in this country. However, as the House will recall, the Chancellor produced only a halt to increasing beer duty. The matter now needs some further careful consideration; a reduction in beer duty is clearly required to bring it in line with the duty charged in other EU member states.

That is especially true because of the Government's reaction to bootlegging. They claimed to have provided about £35 million to fight that problem, yet, a year later, it is estimated that a staggering 75 per cent. of beer imports are still illegal. I do not suggest that the staff of Customs and Excise are not trying to do their job, but even their hard work cannot combat a highly sophisticated and highly organised network of beer bootleggers. Would it not be preferable to fight the problem by reducing the tax in the country where the damage is done than by spending huge sums on enforcing new customs schemes? Otherwise, the risks of smuggling might increase, but the rewards will remain.

The legal importation of beer is another equally devastating blow to our country's brewing industry. It appears that the Government have not listened hard enough to accounts of the plight of brewers that is caused by the massive importation of cheap foreign beer: one pint in every 20 drunk in this country is imported from the continent, resulting in an annual average loss in sales of £12,000 to every pub in the country. That is hard for rural pubs, many of which exist on the edge of economic viability.

This year, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury announced in the House that the Treasury estimated that the Government had lost £50 million to cross-border shopping for beer alone in 1997 and at least £140 million to cross-channel beer smuggling in 1998—a total of £190 million, which is a substantial sum that could have gone into the economy of this country. There is a patent link between lower revenue and higher imports which the Government appear reluctant to tackle. Conservatives recognised the link between loss of revenue suffered by the Government and high duty and made the tax share of the price of a pint of beer the lowest in 30 years.

That point is important, because of the great concern that if beer duty were cut, a large amount of Government revenue would suddenly disappear. That argument would be understandable were it not unfounded. The Treasury's own figures show that considerable economic benefits would accrue from a 20 per cent. cut in beer tax spread over three years. Inflation would fall by 0.5 per cent. and at least 60,000 additional jobs would be created, both because of cheaper beer and the trade won back from the bootleggers. Perhaps the most attractive figure for the Government is that the public sector borrowing requirement would fall by more than £800 million.

I emphasise that any loss of revenue would be short term. It stands to reason that reduced duty rates in Britain would boost domestic consumption, more than outweighing any effect that lower rates might have on revenues. It also stands to reason that if people are not sat at home drinking beer bought in France, they are more likely to be sat in a pub drinking beer bought in Britain. When the Conservative Government reduced the top rate of tax from 60 per cent. to 40 per cent., we found that the total tax take increased. If the Government were to cut beer tax, they would make the same discovery: reduce the tax and the tax take increases. In addition, rural areas would be helped. Surely the Government understand all those long-term benefits.

If duty remains as it is on the continent—so much lower than it is here—it will encourage more smuggling and more shopping overseas, which, in turn, mean less revenue for the Government. That is already happening: the consumption of beer in pubs has declined by almost 2,000 barrels, whereas the importation of beer has increased by 25 per cent. year on year. That is not surprising, given that a Transit van can carry as much beer in one journey as is sold in a small pub in one week. Bootleggers import the equivalent of the beer sales of 5,000 small country pubs, which is almost the number of pubs in Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. That is the scale of the problem. With the UK's duty rate starting as the highest in Europe and then rising, it is entirely predictable that consumers have decided to save money by travelling to France to buy beer. That is all hugely damaging.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the illegal trade in beer is increasingly moving away from the white Transit van trade to paper fraud, which involves beer that has never left the country and which is on sale, not at car boot sales, but in corner shops and other places where people buy beer, believing that they are buying it legally?

Mr. Baldry: That is an extremely good point. If such a huge differential in rates of duty persists, there will be continuing incentives for all sorts of fraud and smuggling. That is especially damaging to small rural pubs, which rely heavily on the sale of beer and often operate at the margins of profitability. Approximately 2,700 small rural pubs have closed in the past 20 years, in spite of Conservatives' attempts to free pubs from ties to national brewers and to enable them to have greater access to the market.

The beer and pub industry is a major employer—often one of the main employers in its locality. Pubs are at the heart of the rural economy and rural social life. Thus their effect on the rural economy derives from being a direct employer and a focus for rural life.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): A representative of a small brewer, Weetwood Ales, attended the first surgery

that I held after winning the Eddisbury by-election to say that he hoped that we would all sign early-day motion 125 on progressive beer duty because the brewery, as a rural employer, was suffering from being penalised.

Mr. Baldry: I am not surprised that beer duty was one of the first issues to be raised with my hon. Friend after he became a Member of Parliament. The early-day motion attracted considerable support from all parties. I shall comment further on that.

Excessive beer duty causes chronic problems for rural pubs and leads to closures. One and a half million pints of beer that are consumed every day in Britain are bought in France and drunk at home. Many rural communities have no pub. According to the Rural Development Commission, 40 per cent. of communities with a population of 1,000 are publess and 40 per cent. have only one pub. Do the Government want to stand by while more of the heart is taken out of our rural communities?

The problem is not confined to the country pub. The family brewing industry, which offers good jobs and provides excellent training, has suffered a series of closures in the past two years. Only 65 breweries remain in Britain—10 fewer than last year. Two brewers, Gibbs Mew and Eldridge Pope, were forced to close last year. More recently, Morrells, one of the country's longest standing family brewers, which is based in Oxford, announced its intention to sell. In the past six months, Maclays and Mitchells have withdrawn from brewing. Clearly, such haemorrhaging, if it is allowed to continue, will threaten the future of the small and medium-sized brewery, such as the 150-year-old Hook Norton brewery in my constituency. Most family breweries are located in rural areas. Again, Government inaction hits the countryside hard. The bootleggers will continue to suck the rural economy dry.

The family brewer and the public house are more closely tied as the family brewer constitutes the largest group of tied tenancies in this country. Partnerships are often forged over many years of working with a local brewer and providing a real service to local communities. Last year, nearly 700 of those pubs closed. The Government should help them as they are often the last bastion of village community life when the school and the shop have closed. Pubs provide good job opportunities that may not otherwise be available in small towns and villages, and harming them will harm job opportunities. That would lead to a loss of revenue that would be laid at the Government's door. It is preferable for jobs to remain in this country, so why do the Government not support the approach that we suggest?

As a short-term compromise, the Society of Independent Brewers and the Campaign for Real Ale have argued for a progressive beer duty, which would mean that small brewers—those who produce less than 30,000 hectolitres a year—would pay only half the excise duty. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) alluded to the recent early-day motion which supported that proposal and attracted 155 signatures from all parts of the House. The Society of Independent Brewers rightly argues that that positive measure would revitalise the United Kingdom brewing industry and, as small breweries tend to be located in rural areas, it would provide a tremendous boost to those communities. Therefore, a progressive beer duty would substantially support the family brewing industry and the rural economy.

The only long-term solution is a significant reduction in the rate of beer tax, not half-measure compromises. The Government must reduce beer duty in line with that in France to undermine cross-border bootlegging and shopping, and simultaneously stimulate economic activity in brewing and the country pub, and ultimately increase the revenue to the Treasury. That is the only realistic way in which to preserve this important rural industry and reinvigorate the rural economy, which the Government are neglecting. I very much hope that the Government will take heed and seek to ensure that family brewers in this country can continue brewing well into the next century and beyond.

9.30 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): I congratulate the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on securing this debate. I listened with great interest to his speech and his remarks about the Hook Norton brewery in his constituency. I join him in wishing that brewery another 150 years of successful trading. I hope that, after hearing my contribution, he will feel that there are grounds for optimism and for believing that that organisation and others will continue to flourish in years ahead. The Government certainly value the important contribution that independent family breweries make to the beer industry and the economy as a whole. They bring diversity to the market and, as the hon. Gentleman said, provide employment opportunities for their local community.

I remind the hon. Gentleman about the important role of alcohol duties in general, and beer duty in particular, in financing public services. In the past financial year, we collected £5.967 billion from alcohol duties in general, and beer accounted for £2.7 billion of that. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that high taxation is putting small breweries and pubs out of business. There are many reasons for the failure of commercial enterprises, and it is much too simplistic to blame duty rates for breweries and pubs closing. From time to time, village shops close. The hon. Gentleman needs to look elsewhere for the explanation for the closures.

In the light of what the hon. Gentleman said, I believe that he may be surprised to learn that alcoholic beverages are now taxed less heavily than they were at the introduction of the single market. Since January 1994—when, if I remember rightly, the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Government—excise duty on beer has fallen in real terms by more than 6 per cent. He made several comments about Conservatives' beliefs on this issue, but they did not appear to hold those beliefs when they were in government.

In addition, the proportion of duty in the cost of a pint has fallen. In 1982, tax represented 38 per cent. of the retail price; today, tax makes up less than 30 per cent. of the price. Despite lower taxation on beer in real terms, the retail price of beer, particularly in the on-trade, continues to rise faster than the average rate of increase in prices in general. The retail price of on-trade beer has risen above the rate of inflation throughout the 1990s.

When the Chancellor increased duty by 1p a pint in his 1997 Budget, price increases by a number of brewers put up bar prices by 8p a pint. Within two weeks of the Chancellor announcing his freeze on beer duty in the

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

previous Budget, one large brewery announced a price increase of up to 6p a pint, and that action was followed by three of its major competitors. Taking January 1987 as 100, the retail price index for all items for August 1999 was 165.5, but the price of beer on the same index was 205.8.

There may be many good commercial reasons for that; nevertheless it is inaccurate to attribute high prices of beer in pubs solely to duty rates. I remind the hon. Gentleman also that the Chancellor's decision to freeze beer duty in the previous Budget represented a cut in duty in real terms. Of course, some in the beer industry argued that the Chancellor should have gone further. The Opposition suggested a 74 per cent. cut in beer duty during the passage of the previous Finance Bill. That proposal would have cost the Exchequer about £3.3 billion in total, including the consequent effect on the rate of duty on wine because, of course, the rates of duty on beer and wine are linked. The cut would have been equivalent to an income tax rise of almost 2p in the pound or a 1 per cent. rise in VAT. The Conservative party did not suggest how that money should be recouped.

The hon. Gentleman made the point that the industry argues for a progressive movement towards approximation with duty levels elsewhere in the European Union—in France, for example. However, reducing alcohol duty rates to French levels would cost more than £5 billion in lost duty and VAT—about 3p on the basic rate of income tax or two percentage points on VAT. Changes on such a scale are simply not realistic, which is no doubt why the previous Government did not move in that direction either.

The hon. Gentleman rightly drew the House's attention to the effects of smuggling, which is undoubtedly a significant problem. He used the problem to support the arguments for drastic cuts in duty. That must be put into perspective. Revenue lost through legal and illegal consumption of imported alcohol amounts to about 2 per cent. of total revenue from alcoholic drinks.

We take criminal activity extremely seriously. Smuggling and fraud deprives the Exchequer of much-needed revenue and threatens law-abiding businesses that want to make an honest living, but we cannot afford to let it undermine our policies and revenue objectives. That is why we initiated the alcohol and tobacco fraud review, which, in consultation with the industry, recommended a comprehensive set of measures to tackle fraud and smuggling. The hon. Gentleman referred to some of the outcome of that review.

As a result, a vigorous programme of counter-measures is being implemented, we have deployed an additional 145 staff—most of them in the front line—and new regulations aimed specifically at tackling commercial fraud are being put in place. We are urging the courts to use all sanctions available against regular offenders who, for example, now face losing their vehicles permanently if they persist in smuggling. Where retailers who are members of the licensed trade are convicted of smuggling offences, Customs and Excise can and does seek revocation of liquor licences.

Customs has recently joined forces with Camelot to fight alcohol and tobacco fraud. As a result, national lottery retailers who are convicted of selling or distributing smuggled alcohol and tobacco could lose their lottery terminals. With annual commission of around £7,500, selling national lottery tickets is often an important part of a retailer's business. That is, therefore, another powerful measure. By working together with other agencies in that way, we are taking steps to crack down on law-breaking, and so help to protect innocent businesses that are not involved in selling smuggled products.

Tougher policies and better targeting are biting, and, as a result, Customs is reporting increasing levels of success against smugglers. In the financial year 1998-99, the tax value of detections by Excise verification officers and anti-smuggling staff rose to £140 million from £76 million over the previous year. In the same period, Customs investigators prevented revenue evasion totalling almost £1 billion—£986 million.

Cutting UK duty rates is not the answer; it is unlikely to stop smuggling and fraud. It is true that price differentials across national borders play a part in the incentive to smuggle, but duty is not the only factor in establishing price.

Some argue that duty rates and consequent competition from imported beer, whether smuggled or purchased legitimately by travellers—the hon. Gentleman referred to this—are directly to blame for pubs and breweries closing. I am aware that some local pubs have closed, but a range of factors are at play—not least brewers' commercial decisions, which are driven by their aim to maximise profits and minimise costs, as one would expect, and which reflect similar decisions taken in other business sectors.

Shepherd Neame, for example, stated in one of its annual reports that part of its future strategy is to

"continue to dispose of back-street and isolated country houses which do not have a viable long-term future".

Interestingly, Shepherd Neame has opened its own pub in the Pas de Calais, where it charges more for its Spitfire beer than it does in its Kent pubs, despite the very much lower duty in France. I applaud the company for its entrepreneurial skills, and I hope that thousands in the Pas de Calais will switch to Spitfire beer as a result, but that places a question mark against claims that duty is to blame for increasing the price of beer in the United Kingdom.

Long-term changes are occurring in consumer tastes—especially, in the UK, an increasing preference for wine. Beer's share of the alcoholic drink market fell from 65 per cent. in 1977 to 54 per cent. in 1998, and in the same period, the share accounted for by wine increased from 10 to 20 per cent. An article in the 1 November edition of *The Licensee and Morning Advertiser*, of which I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is a keen reader, suggests that a likely reason for the shrinking beer market is the breadth of competition that traditional brewers now face from premium packaged spirits, such as Bacardi Breezers, and the growing availability of reasonably priced quality wine. Many underlying trends are contributing to the visible changes.

The proportion of drinkers who drink beer is falling. Interestingly, the share of the alcoholic market in France accounted for by wine is falling. Change is taking place throughout Europe, and we should not be too surprised about what is happening in the UK.

Social changes are affecting people's drinking habits. Increasingly, drink-drive laws are persuading people to drink at home. In absolute terms, the amount of beer consumed in the on-trade has decreased by about 11 per cent. since 1989. In the same period, off-trade sales have increased in volume by more than 50 per cent. The closure of some local pubs, obviously affected by those changes, also reflects a wider general social trend.

As the hon. Gentleman said, some breweries—such as Scottish Courage's Bristol brewery and Whitbread's Cheltenham and Castle Eden breweries—have closed, but that seems to be generally a result of the rationalisation that the sector is undergoing to reduce overcapacity in the industry. Other breweries have been subject to takeover; the hon. Gentleman mentioned the acquisition of Marston's brewery by Wolverhampton and Dudley's. Such takeovers appear to result from the desire to achieve efficiency gains and market position.

Nevertheless, in the past 12 months, strong results and increased profits have been reported by many brewers of all sizes, including independent family brewers. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to quote CAMRA's news release of 21 June. It said:

"We're tired of hearing half-truths about the regional brewing sector when several important independent brewers are announcing increases in real ale sales, profit increases and investment plans. Despite the latest official sales figures"—

I am not sure what is meant by "official sales figures" in that context—

"which indicate a decline, real ale remains central to the success of many family and regional brewers."

Examples follow.

"Young's of London—profits up . . . 31 per cent.

Fuller's of London—. . . up 21 per cent.

Belhavens of East Lothian—. . . up 15 per cent.

Gale's of Hampshire—. . . up 13 per cent.

Timothy Taylor of Keighley—output up, spending £150,000 on new brewing equipment

Arkells of Swindon—profits up and pub estate growing

Saint Austell of Cornwall—investing £1 million in its brewery

Shepherd Neame—investing £1.5 million in its brewery".

In the past year, the share of the beer market accounted for by the 55 regional brewers has increased from 6 to 7 per cent.

The number of microbreweries is pretty healthy. During the 20 years since 1980, the number of microbreweries has increased from 191 to 340. We closely monitor the performance of the industry at all levels, and all these factors are taken into account by the Chancellor in his Budget decisions. The trade can, as always, make its views known to the Chancellor before the next Budget.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to treat with caution the figures that he quoted with regard to the effects of a 20 per cent. cut in beer tax. He was referring, I think, to research commissioned by the trade and carried out three years ago. That is simply wrong. It would be wonderful to think that cutting taxes could have that effect, but the reality is rather different.

I shall quote a much more recent study on alcohol taxes, tax revenues and the single European market, which was published just last month by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. I commend to the hon. Gentleman the view of the IFS. It states:

"We find that the duty rates on beer and wine are below their revenue-maximising levels, so cutting duty on those drinks is likely to cause indirect tax revenue to fall."

The trade has moved away from the 1996 study, recognising that it is not a dependable indicator of what would happen if there were a tax reduction.

The previous Government, of which the hon. Gentleman was a member, did not go down that road. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), who intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Banbury, is innocent of that charge, but the hon. Member for Banbury is not.

I hope that I have succeeded in explaining to the hon. Gentleman and the House the basis of the Government's approach to these matters. Of course, when the time comes, the Chancellor will take a decision about the rate of beer duty in the Budget.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 3 November 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Housing (South-East)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

9.33 am

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am pleased to have this opportunity to introduce a subject that is of great interest to my constituents. We debated this matter yesterday, and I believe that my right hon. and hon. Friends were absolutely correct to raise it. I am sure that we will continue to address the issue in the House as it is vital to the south-east.

We must consider the immensity of new house building that is planned for the south-east. Contrary to what was said in some quarters yesterday, 1.1 million new homes are planned for the south-east. There is no point dismissing that figure out of hand as nonsense, as the Minister did yesterday, or trying to minimise its importance. Although it is not the new total arising from the panel's report—that figure is also substantial—we must consider the overall figure, which has immense implications for the south-east. The 1.1 million figure is equivalent to building five new cities the size of Southampton in the south-east.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The figure that is equivalent to five new cities is the difference between Serplan's recommendations and those of the panel. The 1.1 million figure is really equivalent to 12 new cities the size of Southampton.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I refer anyone who wants to quibble with that figure to paragraph 7.35 of the panel's report, where it appears in black and white. Let us have no attempts to minimise the significance of that figure.

The increase is certainly important to my constituency and to the county of Hertfordshire. The Minister knows that I intend to explore in this debate the plan's detailed implications for Hertfordshire. I am pleased to welcome to the Chamber my right hon. and hon. Friends representing Hertfordshire constituencies, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), my hon. Friends the Members for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), as well as many other hon. Friends who represent constituencies throughout the south-east.

The panel recommends that Hertfordshire should provide 88,000 additional houses between 1996 and 2016—which is a building rate of 4,400 each year. Under existing plans, Hertfordshire is expected to absorb 65,000 additional dwellings between 1991 and 2011, and some 19,000 houses were built between 1991 and 1996—so Hertfordshire is being asked to absorb no fewer than 107,000 new houses between 1991 and 2016. The panel's report suggests an increase of 42,000 new houses in addition to existing plans, so that is another new figure for Hertfordshire to absorb.

That is an immense figure, which is larger than any existing new town in Hertfordshire—and it is just the increase, not the total. The new settlement would be roughly equivalent to the size of Welwyn Garden City. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends from Hertfordshire agree that it will be particularly difficult for the county to absorb such new housing without affecting the environment by building in the green belt. Many existing settlements in Hertfordshire, and new towns that have been developed in the 20th century, do not have a large number of brownfield sites. The housing stock in Hertfordshire is relatively modern and not easy to convert, so few new houses will be delivered through conversion.

That is certainly true of my constituency of Hertsmere. As my constituents know only too well, it has proved extremely difficult to accommodate Hertsmere's existing new-build total of 4,600 houses without making incursions into the green belt. There is tremendous pressure on the green belt, most of which, thankfully, has been diverted. However, if there is to be further expansion on the scale envisaged, building on the green belt in Hertsmere is inevitable.

If divided between Hertfordshire local authorities on roughly the same basis as existing plans, the new plans would require Hertsmere to absorb several thousand—probably about 3,000—new houses. That is the equivalent of a new settlement the size of Radlett in my constituency—and it is only the new houses required by the report; never mind those required under existing plans. There is no way that such a development could be accommodated without building on the green fields that surround the communities in my constituency.

The green belt is especially valuable in Hertsmere, which is situated on the edge of London. Apart from existing settlements, almost all of my constituency is greenbelt land, and my constituents derive no comfort from the philosophy that has apparently been adopted in some quarters—even by the Government—that the loss of green belt in one place can be compensated for by the redesignation of greenbelt land somewhere else. The loss of the green belt in Hertsmere cannot be offset by the designation of more greenbelt land in another part of Hertfordshire, the south-east or even of the country.

That is a formula for devaluing the green belt and constantly shifting it further out. It is a rather bizarre philosophy. I say to the Minister that, if the same principle were applied to wildlife conservation, which is another responsibility of her Department, it would be a bit like saying, when one species becomes extinct, "Never mind; we can make up for that by adding another three species to the endangered list and, therefore, it is a triumph for conservation." The same principle applies to the green belt. We all know that, once the green belt has been lost, it is gone for good—that is concrete over green.

The panel's report contains worrying recommendations for the green belt, and I hope that they will be examined carefully in the House and elsewhere. It contains worrying

[Mr. Clappison]

recommendations for constituencies, such as Hertsmere, where the green belt is not the result of national and international intrinsic designation in the way that areas of outstanding natural beauty are. Such areas appear to be the only type of green belt that the report is prepared to put beyond the reach of developers. The recommendations in the report seem to contemplate explicitly a re-evaluation of the green belt in places such as Hertsmere. We have heard it before, but the message from the report is clear: the green belt is up for grabs.

Such a message is, in equal measure, very bad news for the quality of life of residents and very bad news for the environment. We should not lose sight of the fragility of the environment in the south-eastern counties, which have already been placed under great pressure this century. I understand from Friends of the Earth that, on average over the past 50 years, one species has become extinct every two years. Increasing urbanisation and fragmentation of the countryside and wildlife habitats have greatly contributed to that loss. More greenfield development in the south-east will only accelerate the process and create more and more pressure.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clappison: I trust that the hon. Gentleman represents a south-east constituency, so I shall give way briefly.

Mr. Love: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. For his information, I represent a London constituency, although my borough in the north of London butts on to his local authority.

I listened with interest to the concern that the hon. Gentleman expressed about the green belt. No doubt, other Conservative Members will express similar concerns. Why was that concern not expressed in the years of the previous Government? In the final year of the Conservative Government, 1,200 hectares of green belt were designated for development, but Conservative Members expressed no concern at that time.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman may regret that intervention. He is going down the same course that was taken yesterday by the Minister for Housing and Planning, who made at some length the charge that the previous Government did not do enough for the green belt—Labour Members are nodding. We were criticised from pillar to post yesterday even though the previous Government, of whom I was proud to be a member, constantly sought to increase the amount of brownfield sites that were being developed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: I shall give way to the Under-Secretary, but I have a further question. The Minister for Housing and Planning told us yesterday that the previous Government did not do enough. What did he say when he was Labour's Opposition spokesman in the last Parliament, when the Conservative Government designated 60 per cent. of housing to be on brownfield sites? He told "Planning Week" that the proposal to develop 60 per cent. of new houses by 2016 on brownfield sites was a "recipe for disaster". He said that it would create residential densities

"exceeding those during the 1960s and 1970s".

As the Minister is rising to the bait that was foolishly dangled by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), will she explain just what the then Opposition meant by that?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's questions in my winding-up speech. I want to ask him a question now. Does he accept that, in every year of the final 10 years of the previous Government's term of office, there was a net loss of the green belt?

Mr. Clappison: I have already made clear our philosophy on the green belt and how that differs from the Minister's. We sought to protect the green belt, and that is why we introduced the figures for conservation. The Minister is being foolish. Will she explain why the Labour party, when it was in opposition, opposed at every turn the previous Government's efforts to build more houses on brownfield sites?

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Is my hon. Friend aware that his fears were confirmed by a comment made as recently 29 April? The Minister for Housing and Planning said that

"in certain cases where it is desirable in terms of urban extension and sustainability, there may be a case for reconsidering green-belt boundaries."—[*Official Report*, 29 April 1999; Vol. 330, c. 531.]

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The posture that the Minister for Housing and Planning now takes brings to mind advice that I heard very early in my career in the House. I was told, "If you can't ride two horses at once, don't join the circus." The Minister is in danger of falling off his horses.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North–East Hertfordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is quite unprecedented to build on 2,000 acres, as is happening in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley)? That will enable Stevenage to engulf the whole of that part of north Hertfordshire, potentially joining up Stevenage with Hitchin and with Letchworth. Hertfordshire does not want Stevenage to become Stetchworth or Hevenage. We want to preserve what Victoria Glendinning in her book on Hertfordshire described as the web of lanes with villages between. We do not want to lose that; we want to preserve it for the future.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; we need to look to the future. We are looking for two things from the Minister, and I hope that that is not asking too much in the circumstances. First, we want her to understand what the new housing will mean for the south-east and its residents and how important the issue is. Secondly, we want her to show a willingness to consider alternatives, so that we avoid the environmental catastrophe that is in the making. We have reached the point where we need to consider and debate the alternatives to something that carries profound implications for our constituents.

Those of us in the south-east do not want to see acre after acre of green fields disappearing under concrete year after year. That is the prospect before us and we all have a responsibility to begin a serious and constructive debate on how we can avoid that. To do so is essential for the residents of the south-east and the quality of their lives, to which the green belt is so important, and for the sake of the fragile environment in the south-east. Those of us who represent constituencies in Hertfordshire and the south-east owe nothing less to our constituents.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Has the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) finished his speech? That was not the peroration that I expected.

Mr. Clappison: I was giving way to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells).

Mr. Wells: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I want the Minister to understand completely what the issue implies in my constituency. It implies the coalescence of Stansted airport, Bishop's Stortford, Sawbridgeworth and north Harlow to create a massive new city.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. His point adds weight to the submissions that I have already made.

The issue is of importance. The Minister has heard example after example from Conservative Members of the effects that such development will have on our constituencies. We are now looking for a constructive, serious and sensible response from the Government that shows that they are listening and considering the alternatives.

9.49 am

Mr. Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): I did not want intervene in the debate, because it is fairly early and south-east Labour Members have not had time to consider their opposition to the plans. We shall get together and discuss the issues.

I apologise for the fact that I was not present for the debate yesterday, but I was incensed by a Friends of the Earth press release which claimed that Labour Members—it named me among them—representing marginal seats in the south-east are under pressure from the Whips to conform and shut up on this issue in case we lose the election. As you know, Madam Speaker, Portsmouth—the part of the country that I represent—is lovely, but it is renowned as the second most densely populated area in Europe.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South—

Mr. Rapson: Portsmouth, North.

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) is a neighbour of mine, and a hard-working one. If he casts his mind back to the 1960s, he will recall the horrendous proposal to create a Solent city joining Southampton and Portsmouth. Just about every sensible person rejected it, and it was eventually thrown out. Does he share my concern that chapter 12 of the panel's report contains a section on Solent cities, with the very proposal that we threw out all those years ago? Does he share my concern about that, and will he join me in rejecting the proposal?

Mr. Rapson: Of course I share the concern about the possibility of any linking with Southampton, and the earlier remarks suggesting that the result would be a city five times the size of Southampton panicked me even more. I agree with the general concern, and our approach will be restrained and reasonable.

The city of Portsmouth is densely populated. I represent half the city, and there is little space to move. If I wanted to enter this debate to win the election, I would be saying, "Let my people free. We want the houses outside, in the greenbelt area." That would not be in line with Government policy, but for purely electioneering reasons I would be doing the opposite of what Friends of the Earth are claiming. I would be arguing for the right to expand and allow people to live in a reasonable environment.

It is not good for people to live in multi-storey flats, crammed together in council areas, cheek by jowl. The Opposition have not mentioned the alternative yet. If we do not build in the areas that are free to build in, not all the brownfield sites will be able to cope and it will be necessary to cram people into urban areas.

I am speaking in this debate merely to refute the completely false statement by Friends of the Earth that the Whips are restraining me. I do listen to the Whips and I do comply with most of what they say, but if I felt that I needed to change my mind, no Whip would be able to stop me—and my Whip is in the Chamber. I am too long in the tooth to be under pressure to that extent, but I am a loyal Member, and I make my own mind up. There should be another means of refuting the lies that have been perpetrated, printed and circulated.

Labour Members representing the south-east will get together to discuss their opposition to the plan. No doubt, as I am from Portsmouth, my views will differ from those of most of my hon. Friends. However, the debate will continue, and we shall come up with a concise plan. We shall discuss that with Ministers—instead of conducting megaphone diplomacy, as Opposition Members do, and shouting it from the rooftops purely for political gain.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the request that I initiated to all hon. Members representing the south-east to join together to invite the Government to reject the Crow panel's recommendations. Seventy of the 81 Members of Parliament representing the south-east who are not Labour Members agreed, but not one of the 36 Labour Members of Parliament for the south-east signed up to the letter. Surely the hon. Gentleman understands that the most effective way of putting pressure on the Government is for all Members of Parliament, regardless of party, to unite against this appalling threat to all our constituents in the south-east. Yet not one Labour Member chose to join other colleagues representing south-eastern constituencies. What conclusion are Friends of the Earth and electors in the south-east entitled to draw from that?

Mr. Rapson: I was incensed when I read in a newspaper that I had refused to sign the letter. I do not

[Mr. Rapson]

even recall receiving an invitation. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members probably got loads from Conservative central office, but I never received one. I did not know who Crispin Blunt was; I had to look it up. Madam Speaker, it is difficult to accept an invitation if you do not receive it. Proof of postage is not proof of delivery. I could be telling a fib, but I am not. I did not know that I was invited.

What would I have done, had I been invited? I can argue my case, and the people whom I represent want more housing. Conservative Members say, "We signed up to 'Building a World Class Region: an Economic Strategy for the South East', we want to expand our economic development base and we want new industries to come in—but we do not want any more houses!" The fear might be that if more people live in Conservative areas and county areas, more of them might vote, and more might vote Labour or against the Conservatives. They may do so in greater numbers when the new leader comes. Therefore, if the invitation had been received, the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) probably would have had an acceptance from me, because I do not worry about going into the lamb's den—I would not call it the lion's den—and I am not frightened of meeting anyone.

The debate has enabled me—not to make any sensible suggestions; you did not expect that, Madam Speaker, because you have been here long enough to know better—to defend my position and to say that Portsmouth, North will be represented at sensible discussions with our Labour colleagues in the south-east to try to encourage our Government to see our view and not to go off half-cock, as the Opposition are doing, as usual.

9.56 am

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): First I wish to resist, on behalf of Kent, this extraordinary expansion in the numbers of houses required, not least on ground of water provision. How on earth can the Government square their demands that the water companies cut prices—partly, in our area, by postponing the building of new reservoirs—while wishing upon our area a quantity of houses for which there is simply no water provision? That is hardly an example of joined-up government.

My main argument is that, however many houses we eventually have to accept for demographic reasons and so on, we cannot continue to rely on existing planning methods. At the moment, speculative builders are compelled by the planning laws to take each field as it falls vacant—or as they can get hold of it or take it out of their land bank—and bid for as many houses as possible, regardless of local preferences. It is very hard for councils to define the type of house—

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rowe: I shall take one intervention. I am trying to be brief.

Mr. White: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why planning changes in the 1980s forced developers to take that route, and how the Conservative Government caused many developers to take such a view?

Mr. Rowe: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, no doubt, I do not feel that we have ever, in this country, got right the business of working out where houses should go and the type of houses that we should build. That is not something to be laid at the feet of any one Government. What is crystal clear is that the Government, who are continuously losing credibility as they try to blame everything on their predecessor, have no serious proposals to make on the issue.

Why, for example, when so many well-off retired people choose to spend their money on sheltered housing of the type that McCarthy and Stone or English Courtyard put up, and when, at the other end of the income range, there is such a huge demand for almshouses that one cannot get into them for love or money, does no one appear to feel that it is necessary to build the type of accommodation for less-well-off people that that demands? If it were properly provided, it would make tremendous savings in social services and other support services. If we want joined-up government, we must think across budgets.

I suspect—I have no idea whether it is true, but we should certainly try to find out—that many in single-parent households, which are partly to blame for the new increase in the number of households, would be a great deal happier in accommodation that has various shared facilities, such as a communal room in which to entertain, than being compelled to live in detached, tiny properties where they feel so isolated that they often get into further difficulties.

Builders sell what they sold the last time. The planning system creates artificial shortages, so there is virtually no choice for purchasers. They buy what is available, to which builders say, "We have sold all that we have built, so it must be what everybody wants." As a result, very little effort is made to break the mould, and many builders still sell houses like those their grandfathers built, except with modern appurtenances such as new kitchens.

I have played a role in the campaign for lifetime homes—the building of new houses that allow for level-entry access, enabling disabled, old or frail people easier use of their homes. I am very pleased to welcome the new planning regulations, which have gone some small way towards that.

Too many people live in absolutely foul homes. Local authorities and housing associations are simply not prepared to do them up because, on some unspecified day in the future, they are to be redeveloped. That means that, for a whole generation, some families live in the kind of house that we would not tolerate for ourselves. We have inspectors for pigsties and hen coops, but, as far as I can see, very ineffective inspection mechanisms for people's houses.

Such problems are partly because no Government—this Government have shown even less interest in doing so than their predecessors—will trust people with resources. The idea of giving them a small amount of money to try to improve their housing environment is tried occasionally in odd places, but when it is deemed a success it is never generalised because, in the end, local authorities do not trust people.

Why are we so totally unimaginative about the provision of granny accommodation? It is extremely difficult for people to extend their houses to provide for their elderly relatives—mainly because of planning laws. Why are we so reluctant, for example, to enable people to erect temporary houses? Modern mobile homes provide

admirable accommodation for various elderly people. I have seen such housing work extremely well, yet planning regulations are against it. That is fatal.

Last night, we heard the Government's extraordinary argument that more provision in the south-east will benefit the poor. When carried to the extreme, that suggests that the entire population of the United Kingdom could move to the south-east.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's aim of imposing 250,000 new homes on Kent, while, as he said, the Environment Agency is preventing the expansion of water provision and the water regulator is trying to prevent the extension of reservoirs, is absolute nonsense, and that the Government ought to think again?

Mr. Rowe: My hon. Friend confirms the point with which I started: such an argument is as arid and ridiculous as one can imagine.

The Government's argument is exactly comparable to the Deputy Prime Minister's desire to punish motorists so that they will use public transport: that from a man who has never seen Victoria underground station in the rush hour because he drives around in his ministerial car.

10.4 am

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): One of the things that I have found distressing since the publication of the Crow report is the lack of a rational debate about housing in the south-east. I found it disturbing that the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) said that the entire United Kingdom population could move to southern England. I seem to recall a former Tory Cabinet Minister saying, "Get on your bike and find a job! Come to the south-east." The hon. Gentleman seems to have forgotten that.

Another argument seems to be that we can beat market forces. I am a little confused when I hear that deployed by Conservative Members, who argue at the same time that market forces cannot be beaten when it comes to jobs or old-style industries in which people could lose employment.

Mr. Blunt: I was under the distinct impression that the House did precisely that on Monday on behalf of a firm in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mr. White: I have always argued that we should intervene in the market; it is the Conservative party that has always argued that we should not.

It is important that we get beyond the rhetoric of this debate and yesterday's, and get down to what we want to achieve in the south-east. Reference has been made to the south-east England development agency report. The south-east might be top of the economic activity league table in the United Kingdom, but it is not top of the table in Europe. Over a long period in the early 1990s, we were falling down the table quite rapidly. It is also important to consider the jobs and skills base in the south-east. Then, we may begin to consider housing.

My city has undergone similar growth to Reading, Wokingham and the Berkshire area over the past 30 years, but, because it was planned, and the development corporation and private investors worked together, the city works. We do not have the congestion that is suffered around Reading, Wokingham and Newbury.

The question is one not of providing no more housing or of concreting over everything, but of what is appropriate.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Concrete cows?

Mr. White: I point out to my hon. Friend that the growth of Milton Keynes has resulted in the planting of 22 million trees. There is more green space in the city than in many urban areas. Having planned properly, such space has been built into the city.

If we are to have jobs and provide quality of life, we must have a more rational debate. Just to say no is a fair response, but would result in rising house prices in urban Portsmouth and any other town in the south-east. Demand would still be apparent, but supply scarce. It is a basic law of economics that prices would rise as a result. Conservative Members may not mind that, but I argue that that is how to cause social disruption and chaos. It would not solve the economic issues in the south-east, such as the creation of jobs. In some rural communities, particularly villages, simply saying no leads to people having to move away from their parents and grandparents, losing continuity with their families.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I think that every Conservative Member accepts that there must be some additional housing; the question is how much. These plans are absurd and without precedent. The hon. Gentleman talked of green spaces in Milton Keynes, but does he not realise that the plans will close all green gaps between rural settlements in my constituency and those of many Members on both sides of the House? Local people will not accept that their concerns and wishes are being overridden by the Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman is making an intervention, not a speech.

Mr. White: I do not know the particulars of the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and I would not dream of commenting on it. However, a blanket decision to build no housing or to build everywhere is the wrong approach.

Before I entered the House, I was chair of the Local Government Association planning committee, and before that, the planning committee of the Association of District Councils. I had to discuss with Conservative Ministers planning guidance notes on behalf of local government. The concerns that have been expressed this morning were not the concerns that we heard from Ministers at that time.

In Castlethorpe, a village in my constituency, the building of an extra dozen houses kept open the local school, pub and shop because there was sufficient economic activity in the village for those facilities to keep going. If you are saying that there should have been no development in that village—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair does not say anything in these debates.

Mr. White: My apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the Opposition are saying that there should be no

[Mr. White]

development, the village would have lost its pub, shop and school, and we would have heard from the Opposition an outcry about the rural economy such as we heard last week. That is a direct result of their blinkered policy and knee-jerk reaction.

Mr. Gale: What we are saying is that the Government seek to foist 250,000 new homes on Kent, without taking into account the fact that the people living in those homes will require water, sewerage, education and so on. When will the Government join up and bring together the Department for Education and Employment, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and other relevant Departments to make provision before the proposals are put through Parliament?

Mr. White: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that there should be proper planning provision for water, schools and infrastructure, I entirely agree. However, if he is saying that the Serplan figures as presented were not a political fix by the Tory-run county councils in the south-east of England going against their officers' advice and coming to a political conclusion before presenting that report to Government, he is not living in the real world. That is exactly what happened under Serplan. It was a political fix and an attempt by Tory councils in the south-east of England to embarrass the Government. Professor Crow did a good job in exposing the fact that Serplan deliberately distorted the figures in an attempt to provoke an argument with the Government.

Mr. Hoyle: Does my hon. Friend agree that before any planning application and during the discussions, one of the bodies consulted is the water authority, which is asked whether it can provide enough water and deal with the sewage for any proposed development? That is the way in which the planning system was set up by the previous Government. If the Opposition now want the water companies to be taken back into public hands, I support that, but the companies' rules clearly state that they must be notified of planning applications.

Mr. White: My hon. Friend makes an important point, contrasting the policies of the previous Conservative Government with the present knee-jerk reaction of the Conservatives in opposition.

In my city there are 750 families in temporary accommodation. Opposition Members say that we should not be dealing with that problem, but they are wrong. In respect of Milton Keynes—I am not speaking of the south-east generally—Professor Crow's report is balanced and offers sensible suggestions regarding the way forward for the Milton Keynes-Bedford triangle.

One of the Opposition's arguments is that the green belt is sacrosanct and should not change. I remind hon. Gentlemen that it was a Labour Government who created the green belt in 1947, opposed by some of the predecessors of the current Opposition. If hon. Gentlemen think that everything in the green belt is a green field, they obviously do not know what the green belt looks like in some areas. If swapping parts of the green belt is beneficial for the local community, and if the local community wants to do so, as has been done—to be fair to the previous Government, they allowed that in certain circumstances—that is a reasonable position.

The fact that there will be more green belt as a result of the changes in Stevenage is a positive development. I would argue that the green belt ought to be extended. There is no green belt round my city, but the concept of linear parks has been devised, which did more than a green belt would have done. The debate must be conducted on a more rational basis. Economic issues should be at the heart of the debate and should be taken more seriously than has been the case hitherto.

The Opposition imply that the Government have already reached a decision on the Crow report. All that has happened is that Tory counties dominating Serplan have put forward proposals, an inspector has sat in public, heard evidence and made a recommendation to the Government, to which they have yet to respond. It is hardly a case of the Government telling councils what to do. The Opposition suggest that the Government will accept every dot and comma in the report, but I should be surprised if they did.

May I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that when the Government consider the Crow report as it relates to Milton Keynes, they view it as a sensible way forward? Growth will take place because market forces dictate that—I find it strange that Opposition Members think that they can defeat market forces—and if market forces dictate that growth will occur, it should be sustainable, planned and locally accountable. I hope that the Minister will apply that in respect of Milton Keynes.

10.17 am

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on initiating the debate. For the sake of brevity, may I say that I entirely endorse his analysis of the Crow report.

We debated the issue yesterday, and we return to it today. I hope that that sends a clear message to the Government that we will not let the matter drop. I make no apology for returning to it yet again, as it is supremely important to my constituency since the unprecedented approval by the Government for the building of 10,000 houses in the green belt west of Stevenage in my constituency.

That decision will be devastating locally for the environment, and for transport, the resources and facilities of our area, but it is not just an issue of local importance. It affects not just Hitchin or Hertfordshire. It affects the entire country, wherever there is greenbelt land. Planning proceeds by precedent. If the decision is allowed to go ahead, it will be cited as a precedent elsewhere.

Throughout my 16 years in Parliament, there has been pressure on the green belt in the area that I represent. I have appeared at public inquiries whenever proposals have come forward, and we have seen every one off. Not a single acre has been lost to house building from greenbelt land in my area. However, this decision creates the biggest-ever precedent of which I am aware for building in the green belt. By approving it, the Deputy Prime Minister has driven a coach and horses—perhaps I should say two Jags and all their horsepower—through the sanctity of the green belt. Unless his decision is reversed or restricted, it will be quoted in every constituency where there is greenbelt land.

I want to warn hon. Members that those pressures will be accentuated because of the Crow report. The Government must reject it, for the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere.

Mr. White: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: I will give way to the soon-to-depart Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White). His speech will not go down well with people in his area.

Mr. White: If my getting here was unlikely, my return will disappoint the right hon. Gentleman even more. He said that the Government have already made a decision on the report and then he asked them to reject it. When did the Government agree the Crow report?

Mr. Lilley: I was referring to the Government's approval of a planning decision for 10,000 houses on greenbelt land in my constituency.

The Government should reject the Crow report. It is strange that they refused to do so yesterday, and we shall see whether they refuse to do so today. The report is contrary to their policy of rejecting the predict-and-provide approach. It is strange that they do not reject it, because it conflicts with Lord Rogers's urban task force, which the Government set up, and with the will of the vast majority of people.

When I first took the Deputy Prime Minister to task for approving the decision to build up to 10,000 houses in my constituency, he justified his approval by alleging that there was local democratic support. That was nonsense. It had been steamrollered through the county council by the Lib-Lab coalition, which had an overall majority of one. The council knew that it could not count on that majority because some of its members, rightly, were prepared to rebel on the issue. The standing orders were changed and the matter was put through a sub-committee where there was a majority. The council undemocratically refused to let the matter come before the full council. That decision was steamrollered through with the approval of only 14 out of 72 members on the council in Hertfordshire. It was never democratic.

Since the Deputy Prime Minister cited democracy as his reason for giving approval, the Conservatives have regained control of Hertfordshire, not least because of that issue. The Conservatives have also regained control of North Hertfordshire district council by a thumping majority, also because of that issue.

There is massive public disapproval of building on the green belt. There is massive public concern about the Crow report. The Government should reject it, and do so rapidly. They should at least return to the already very high projections that were being worked on before. If they do not, they will find that many Labour Members, who are not present today, who refused to sign the letter asking the Government to reject the Crow report, will not be back here after the next election.

10.23 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on securing this important debate. When the news of the Crow report was released in Hampshire, there was genuine shock and concern among my constituents and constituencies across the entire Hampshire region. It was one of the few times since I became a Member of Parliament that my telephone began to ring quickly after an announcement. It is because of that shock and concern that I am disappointed with the quality of the debate last night and this morning. We appear to be listening to a history lesson on party politics about who said what and how much greenbelt or brownbelt land has been built on. Some speeches have tried to blame a certain party for this development.

I can say categorically that my constituents and others in the south-east do not want this to be turned into a cheap party political issue. They want to see a way forward to solve some of the difficulties that we all face in our areas as Members of Parliament.

Mr. Rapson: I want to thank the Gentleman because, when this issue broke, he was the first person to contact me. I appreciated that because he wanted to talk constructively about the way ahead. The hon. Gentleman is trying to keep this out of the political arena and work constructively.

Mr. Oaten: Hon. Members may laugh, but, among Hampshire Members, there has been cross-party support, Tory and Labour. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) has responded to a letter from me to take part in this debate. I appreciate the fact that, across Hampshire, we have managed to keep politics out of this issue. That must be the way forward if we are to serve our constituents properly.

Hampshire Members are concerned that, over a couple of years, Hampshire has gone through a process of battling with the difficult figures that have been imposed on us. We have just agreed on a figure of 56,000 homes for the Hampshire area. That took considerable manipulation of public opinion. It was difficult to persuade people that that figure could be accepted—most of the community were, like me, against it. Therefore, one can imagine the horror when, having agreed on 56,000, we are told one week later that the figure for Hampshire should be 169,000, making it the highest figure of all the south-east counties.

Mr. Love: Does the hon. Gentleman reject the collective nimbyism of the Conservative party? If so, does he accept, as the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs does, the robustness of the figures showing the need for additional housing over the next 20 years? Does he also accept that if we do not build that housing, people will go without?

Mr. Oaten: People need housing in the south-east and I do not take a nimby approach, but I am concerned about the public's confusion.

We hear some encouraging noises from the Government. We hear that they do not want to build on greenfield land, that they want to protect the countryside, reduce traffic growth, encourage bottom-up planning and address the difference of the balance of growth between the regions. They also want to try to end the policy of predict and provide. The public hear those announcements and are encouraged, but the report from Professor Crow contradicts all that. It is no wonder that the public feel confused and let down by their politicians.

[Mr. Oaten]

The Government's response to the report presents the Deputy Prime Minister with the first opportunity to demonstrate that he means some of the rhetoric. I hope that, when the Government respond—perhaps the Minister will do so this morning—they will show that the language that they have used will be matched by their response to the document.

The biggest area in which the Crow report is out of sync with moving Government opinion is on the whole issue of predict and provide. We know that predict and provide is a hit-and-miss approach to housing. We know that if the figures are wrong and there is building on greenfield land, it can no longer go back to being greenfield land. It is a dangerous approach, which we reject. However, some individuals argue that such housing would be a good thing for the south-east. We are seeing the development of some organisations that are arguing that the south-east should be the powerhouse of Europe, that it should be in the top 10 regions of Europe and that we should be moving forward and making it dynamic region.

I do not want the south-east to be one of the top 10 regions in Europe if the price for that is ruining our countryside, clogging up our roads even more and making our schools too full. That is not the approach we want. Of course we want economic advantages in the south-east, but quality of life is a much more important principle than some of the economic gains. If the price of that is building new houses, I reject that approach.

We should also be looking at a balance of economic gain among the regions. Pushing the south-east forward in the way that is being suggested by some of the housing figures and documents I have read is not the right way forward. We need to balance the north-south divide. I am sure that hon. Members who represent seats in the midlands and the north would welcome some urban regeneration and progress in their areas.

Even if we believed that we needed these housing numbers in the future, in reality, what we would get would not meet demand. In the future, we will need more homes for single and elderly people. A great deal of demographic evidence suggests that that is correct. The Crow report is a green light to developers to build four and five-bedroom executive homes on greenfield sites with no infrastructure next to them. That is not where our new homes and our future population need to be.

In the Whiteley area of my constituency, I have seen what can go wrong when greenfield sites are suddenly covered with such executive homes. There is a development of nice homes in Whiteley, but no community. There are no postboxes or telephone boxes, no bus routes through the development and no community centre. The local schools cannot take the children who live in that development, and there is pressure on the GPs in the area. There is disquiet about traffic problems, because there is chaos day in, day out from traffic trying to get into the area. Those problems were caused because the planning was ill thought through. Homes are built on green fields without the infrastructure being put in place.

Mr. White: One problem is that the type of housing to be built is not a planning consideration. Social housing should be a planning consideration, so that the authority can dictate what type of housing should be built in a particular area.

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman is right. We should find ways of building more affordable homes in the south-east.

If we are to avoid the Whiteleys and the big greenfield developments that do not work, we must provide more affordable housing. We should build more housing in villages, so that our youngsters can stay there. We need housing to ensure that young professional couples on fairly small salaries can afford to live in those communities. In Winchester, the price of housing is phenomenal and out of all proportion. We must have much more affordable housing in the future.

Will the Minister please consider the report carefully? This is not a party political issue: it is about what the south-east needs. The report will not deliver the homes that we need in the south-east. We need a more creative solution, and I hope that the Government will consider that carefully.

10.31 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I should like to follow the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) by giving practical examples of where the planning process is going wrong and where it will go further wrong. In the villages of Beltinge and Broomfield in Herne Bay in my constituency, planning applications have been submitted for hundreds of houses. No consideration has properly been given to the fact that there is insufficient water and primary health care provision, that the junior schools in Herne Bay are bursting at the seams, and that the secondary school is over-subscribed and the children have to travel out of the town past their nearest school to another school to obtain their education.

The Environment Agency, for its own ludicrous reasons, is trying to prevent Mid Kent Water from extending a reservoir. The water regulator, under pressure from the Government, is trying to cut the investment by Mid Kent Water in capital projects by a massive 40 per cent. Southern Water, which is responsible for the disposal of sewage in the area, is also having its capital expenditure cut. The Government have cut their contribution to Kent county council's funds, leaving less money for investment in education, while the council is having to find £5 million to subsidise asylum seekers under a programme that the Government have failed to get to grips with. That is not joined-up government.

Crow proposes to impose 250,000 homes on the county of Kent with no consideration of how water, sewage services, medical care or education will be provided. Unless and until this joined-up Government can do joined-up writing and read joined-up writing, this project will be an absolute disaster. I urge the Government to review and reject the Crow report.

It was said earlier that the previous Government had rigged Serplan to reduce the number of houses. Let me tell the Minister and her Back-Bench colleagues that I and others fought furiously the then Minister, our former colleague Robert Jones, when he tried to impose even those figures on the south-east. The current proposal is not a step too far, it is a mile and a half too far and it cannot go ahead.

10.34 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) that the proposal for 1.1 million new houses in the south-east over the next 20 years, including 150,000 extra houses under the latest plans in my county of Essex, is environmental vandalism and is unacceptable because of the strains that it would place on the infrastructure. Soulless communities would emerge from such a mass of housing in my county.

If these plans were to go ahead, Essex would have to provide more than 150,000 extra homes. That is 7,500 extra homes a year, which is equivalent to 62 square miles of land in Essex. Under the existing structure plan for 1996-2011, Essex was expecting to build 78,600 new homes. Under the current proposals, as upgraded by the Crow report, there would be a 43 per cent. increase in those projections. Similarly, under the structure plan proposals, 12,000 houses were expected to be built on greenfield sites. Under the latest projections, 46,000 houses would concrete over greenfield sites in Essex.

Mid-Essex would be expected to take a disproportionate amount of the housing for the county. Villages such as Boreham, which is about four miles from the outskirts of Chelmsford, would become a suburb of Chelmsford because of the 11,000 homes that would be built in the north-east of the town. The whole of the A12 corridor would have to be built on to meet those targets. That is wrong and unacceptable, and the infrastructure could not cope. Soulless new housing estates would be built, and that would lead to acts of vandalism through mindless boredom because of the sheer numbers. I urge the Government to reject the report.

10.36 am

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on securing a debate on this subject. His constituency marches with mine. It is not possible to read speeches into the record, but I should like *Hansard* to repeat my hon. Friend's speech under my name, deleting Hertsmere and replacing it with South-West Hertfordshire, because I have the same problems as he has. The idea of covering 28 sq km of Hertfordshire in concrete is unacceptable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) sent a good letter to two-Jags, our Deputy Prime Minister, complaining about what was happening under Serplan and Crow. Some Liberal Democrats signed it, because they know a good thing when they see it. Despite the brave words of the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson), no Labour Member signed it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) has explained the change of balance and control in Hertfordshire. The Liberal Democrats supported the Labour party in the county. In Hemel Hempstead, which was an impossible seat for the Conservatives to win as it was a strong Labour seat, this was the No. 1 issue and a Conservative councillor was elected. In a perverse way, I welcome these proposals, because the Labour gains in the general election will melt like snow at the next election.

I can read into the record the comments made by practically everyone connected with planning. They condemn what is going on, except the House-Builders Federation, which of course is in favour of it. The chairman of the environment committee in my council, Jane Pitman, said:

> "I am absolutely stunned. The figure is an early Christmas present to the developers."

I have had letters from my two councils warmly praising the stand that we are taking against these developments.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) made the point that there is no provision for water, schools, health care and sewerage. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. White) is wrong. The water companies have a legal obligation to supply water to houses, and they cannot block that.

I detect a political spin. The Government produced figures to Serplan from a smoke-filled room and there was a huge outcry. What have they done? They have got a tame professor and an appointed panel, and have come up with an even larger figure. In the fullness of time, the Government will reject Crow and everyone will say, "What a reasonable, kind Government to go back to Serplan"—go back to a plan that will create a new town next to my right hon. Friend's constituency.

I do not believe that these proposals will wash. They will not work. It will mean electoral gains for us, but will be a disaster for South-West Hertfordshire.

10.40 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on securing the debate. He was, as always, assiduous in presenting the concerns of his constituents. I also welcome the Minister to her relatively new job. This is her second outing on the subject of the debate in as many days, and I assure her that it will not be her last.

I note in passing that the Minister does not have the benefit of the presence of the Minister for Housing and Planning beside her today. No doubt he is tied up, if not with affairs of state, at least with the campaign of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) for the post of mayor of London.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Next year, draft regional planning guidance will be published, and then there will be a period of consultation. Would it not be sensible if, during that period, the new Minister visited the counties concerned as part of the consultation, and heard at first hand the concerns of local people about the impact of the proposals on counties such as Oxfordshire?

Mr. Waterson: I agree. I think that Ministers, including the Deputy Prime Minister, should make their own contribution to breaking down the north-south divide in this regard.

One of the casualties of the reshuffle in which the Minister was promoted was the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). Like the Deputy Prime Minister, Conservative Members regret his passing. Now there was a Minister who knew all about development on the green belt.

Yesterday, the Minister ploughed through her script, refusing to take interventions and ducking many of the questions raised by my hon. Friends. Today, as luck would have it, she has the opportunity to put that right. Yesterday, she spent an inordinate amount of time

[Mr. Waterson]

attacking the record of previous Conservative Governments; I hope that, today, she will tell us about the future.

When it comes to the environment, Labour Members say one thing and do another. They used reassuring words before the election about protecting our environment, but, in office, the reality is very different. Halfway through this Parliament, it is plain for all to see that two key policies are failing: Labour's regional policy, and its policy to encourage more new development on recycled or brownfield land.

Labour set up an urban task force chaired by the eminent Lord Rogers, which reported with some 105 recommendations. At the last count, the Government had implemented only one, and that only on a pilot basis. Lord Rogers also had some uncomfortable things to say about the current direction of Government policy. The task force concluded that the Government had no prospect of achieving even their own target of 60 per cent. new development on brownfield sites on the basis of existing policies. That, it thought, could be achieved only through a shift of the regional balance of wealth and opportunity to regenerate the towns and cities of the north and the midlands. This is the first recorded example of a Government being sunk by its own task force.

Professor Crow's report, of which we have heard a great deal this morning, makes it clear that the target for new housing on recycled land is to be reduced from 60 to 50 per cent.

This is also a tale of two Britains. It is, to say the least, ironic that, last week, the eight regional developments agencies delivered their 10-year blueprints to the Deputy Prime Minister against a background of growing turmoil over the Government's plans for massive new house building in the south-east and elsewhere. In my so-called region of the south-east, the RDA has come up with a range of proposals to make the south-east "a world-class region" and one of the top 10 in Europe. No doubt that will be welcomed in the pockets of relative lack of prosperity in the south-east, but what does it mean for parts of the south-east that are already in danger of economic overheating, let alone those in less fortunate parts of the country which were hoping that the Government's policies would help them to catch up? Whatever happened to joined-up government?

Now, in very short order, we have seen two dramatic developments: the publication of Professor Crow's panel report, and the leaked report from the Government's performance and innovation unit. The latter is very worrying, because it advocates a loosening of planning controls on development on farm land, stating that

"the presumption within national policy against development of best and most versatile land should be removed".

We have heard a great deal about the conclusions of the Crow panel about the alleged need for 1.1 million more homes in the south-east before 2016.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Crow proposals are wholly unrealistic? The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) articulated the concerns of all of us who represent Hampshire constituencies. During the 1990s, an average of 5,800 dwellings a year have been built in Hampshire, including the cities of Portsmouth and Southampton, and, if the Crow requirements are to be met, 8,500 will need to be built per annum. That is simply not attainable.

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The suggestion that there should be a 64 per cent. increase in the south-east over and above even the projections of Serplan is quite barmy—the equivalent, as we have heard, of five cities the size of Southampton. As the Council for the Protection of Rural England has pointed out, the Crow report puts more than 430 sq km of rural land—an area larger than the Isle of Wight—under the threat of urban sprawl.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): The Conservative Opposition have spoken against housing on greenfield sites. Do the same arguments apply to commercial development on such sites?

Mr. Waterson: There are major considerations relating to new commercial development on greenfield sites, but this debate is primarily about housing.

The debate casts a penetrating spotlight on the accelerating migration from north to south in our country. As I have said, this is a tale of two Britains with an ever-widening gulf between them, and of Ministers who are apparently unwilling or powerless to reverse the trend—but reverse it we must, unless countless acres of green field are to be concreted over for ever. That is why we are proposing a different planning regime in areas that are already prosperous, and whose infrastructure is under pressure. The aim is to relieve pressure on those areas, while encouraging regeneration and economic development in other areas so that the brightest and the best will not move south, but will stay where they are to make their own contribution to that regeneration and development.

Here we have two flagship Government policies that are in crisis—that are clearly failing. The results are potentially catastrophic. We have heard today of the likely effects on a number of constituencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere described the problems faced by Hertfordshire, and many others representing constituencies in the area have made similar points. We have also heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) and from South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), and we heard a powerful speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who mentioned the 10,000 new homes planned for his area.

My hon. Friends the Members for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) and for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) both asked where these new homes are supposed to go. How is an infrastructure that is often already strained to bursting point supposed to cope? What is to be done about roads, schools, hospitals and natural resources such as water? The Government's policy makes a mockery of sustainable development.

Nor are these concerns limited to Conservative Members. A letter signed by nearly 70 Members representing constituencies in the south-east, organised by my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and delivered to the Deputy Prime Minister last Friday, bears the signatures of Liberal Democrats as well as Conservatives. Sadly, it does not bear the name of a single

Labour Member. Do Labour Members not care about the likely effects on their constituents in areas such as Crawley and Milton Keynes, or are they too cowed by their Whips?

Some, however, are made of sterner stuff—for instance, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who, referring to plans to build more housing near Newcastle, said in February last year:

"I put it to my right hon. Friend that that sort of madness is deeply ingrained and must be stopped rather than merely discouraged."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1998; Vol. 305, c. 826.]

Let us hope that the hon. Gentleman's translation to being a Minister in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will bring some sense to bear on the Government's policies.

In yesterday's debate, the Minister for Housing and Planning was pressed more than once to disown the panel's report. He refused. Indeed, he rather ominously went on to claim that densities in the south-east were the lowest in the country. In an earlier debate, he accepted that there would be more encroachment on to the green belt. Are Ministers preparing a way for the massive new development foreshadowed by the report? Why are Ministers so determined not to disown it? Why can they not welcome the common-sense approach advocated by us—in short, a common-sense revolution in planning?

We say that decisions on local planning should be made in and by local communities that are affected by those decisions, with minimum interference from Ministers and civil servants. The Government say that they no longer believe in predict and provide, but they cling to housing figures that are being dictated from on high.

It comes to this. The evidence is overwhelming. The Government seem prepared to preside over a bricks-and-mortar invasion of the south-east to allow the concreting-over of vast swathes of our countryside, destroying some ancient and picturesque communities. How can we reach any other conclusion when Ministers refuse to disown the panel report's conclusions? I call on the Minister to come clean on the Government's attitude to the report and to take the opportunity to declare that it is wrong-headed, dangerous and wholly unacceptable in a democratic society. Will she grasp that opportunity now?

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on his choice of subject for the Adjournment debate. I listened carefully to the tone of his speech. It is sad that he was badly let down by the speech of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, which cut across a reasonable effort—which I was prepared to try to rise to—to begin to have a sensible and constructive debate about the issue.

Housing in the south-east has been, and will remain for some time, a source of intense interest. That is absolutely right. People are worried about the effects of unconstrained house building. Several Members have voiced their concerns about the effects that it might have on different communities.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere made a plea that, in my response, I would demonstrate an understanding of those concerns and a willingness to approach the matter with full seriousness before the Government give their response. I am happy to give him those two assurances, but I make a plea to Opposition Members: they should recognise that serious and extensive consideration of the complex issues involved is needed, and that they should not resort to knee-jerk reactions, in the way that many have.

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to the Minister for saying that she is listening, but I also asked her to look at the alternatives. I specifically invited her to look at the common-sense alternatives that have been suggested by the Conservative Front-Bench team. May I gently give her the following warning? If the Government do not do that, they will face a wave of anger in the south-east that is even bigger than the wave of anger coming from the rural communities.

Ms Hughes: We will consider what the panel report says and say what we think about it. That will include other options.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: No. I will make a little progress and then I will be pleased to give way.

I outline why my plea for serious consideration of the issues is important. The debate on housing in the south-east illustrates the potential conflicts that we all seek to resolve. The south-east needs jobs. It needs to be competitive in the international economy. I am surprised to hear that the Liberal Democrats do not want the south-east to be among the top 10 European regions. We should not pull down the shutters and tell firms to go elsewhere. The south-east supports London—

Mr. Oaten: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: I will carry on for a moment and make my point. The hon. Gentleman has had his opportunity.

The south-east supports London, one of the few world cities of immense financial importance. The combined pull of London and the south-east ensures that the United Kingdom stays attractive to international investors. It is all in the melting pot in the debate on the south-east—jobs, housing, regional imbalances, international competitive, the strength of the UK economy. It is a big picture.

Therefore, we need to continue to attract high-value enterprises and employment to the region. Employees will need decent homes to live in. Employers need to know that they will be able to attract good-quality workers who can live in the area in which they work. Although we will increasingly support efforts to bring the economic attractiveness and capacity of other regions up to those of

[Ms Hughes]

the south-east, we must not allow ourselves to constrain the south-east to the extent that it fails to realise its economic potential for the UK as a whole.

Mr. Oaten *rose—*

Mr. Howarth *rose—*

Ms Hughes: I give way initially to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten).

Mr. Oaten: I make it clear that the Liberal Democrats of course support economic vibrancy in the south-east, but not if the price is housing on green fields, clogged-up roads and infrastructure that cannot cope with that development.

Ms Hughes: The record will show that the hon. Gentleman said that, if the price was too high, he would not want the south-east to be one of the top 10 European regions. That is a serious matter for the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Howarth: The Minister has accused Opposition Members, and I include the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), of a knee-jerk reaction. That is not so. The Serplan proposals have been debated for years. There has been careful consideration of all the factors that she has mentioned and now Professor Crow has come along and thrown the whole thing into turmoil—the whole south-east is in turmoil as a result of that man. It is incumbent on the Government to say that they will swiftly consider—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That intervention is far too long.

Ms Hughes: I will deal with that matter when I come to it in my speech.

We need to recognise that people in the south-east will also suffer if we do not provide housing. House prices will rise and poorer members of communities will be squeezed out. The hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) alluded to the social problems that can occur.

At the same time, we are conscious of the need to safeguard and enhance the environment of the region. Environmental quality is an important attractor in its own right. There is superb countryside. We want to retain that landscape and biodiversity.

Previous Labour Governments developed the planning system precisely to enable the countryside to be protected and to get away from sprawl. Let us contrast that planned approach with the years of Tory failure. I will not go into that in detail again. We rehearsed it last night and Opposition Members' interventions have taken my time, but they know the record and it stands for anyone to see.

The problem is that, having built inertia to sprawl and car dependence, the Opposition and their local authority members do not like the consequences. The tragedy is that they are trying, Canute like, to stop the drift from towns, hoping that attempting to stop housing developments in the face of housing needs will solve their problem. The Government have set about revising policy to allow more sustainable development—sustainable in environmental, economic and social terms.

We are revising planning guidance. We have introduced the new deal for transport, the urban task force—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) approached the Chair and stated that I had been unfair to him because I had shortened his intervention. It is my duty to ensure that interventions are short. The occupant of the Chair is even handed with every hon. Member, no matter which part of the House in which they sit. I put that on the record. I certainly do not wish hon. Members to come to the Chair and to tell me what my duties are and what my job should be.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will not take up the time of the Minister because I know that she has to respond to the debate. I will refer the matter to you privately afterwards, if I may. I apologise if I have—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. If the hon. Gentleman has any worries or concerns about my conduct in the Chair, he should take the matter up with Madam Speaker.

Ms Hughes: It is unfortunate, given the manner in which I was prepared to approach the debate, that the antics of Opposition Members have severely curtailed my time and that I cannot make some of the reasoned points that I would have wished to make.

Let us get a couple of things straight about the panel report. The Government did not produce the Serplan report, as the hon. Member for South–West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) contended. The Government did not produce the independent panel report. That report was prepared after an exhaustive examination in public. It sets out its case strongly.

Mr. Page: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: No, I will not give way to anyone else.

The panel heard the views of different interested parties in the region. It listened carefully to those views and Opposition Members know its conclusions; I will not rehearse them. The Government will respond to Serplan and the panel report when we are ready, which will be as soon as possible. We do not want the matter to drag on and we consider seriously the views of Opposition and Labour Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We now come to the next debate.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

11 am

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I am privileged to be able to initiate this important Adjournment debate. First, however, I should like to welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to the Treasury Bench.

In this Session, we have had more debates, early-day motions and parliamentary questions on the subject of wildlife protection than I would even dare to mention now. Nevertheless, I make no apology for returning to the subject again, after making a speech on it in another Adjournment debate, in July, right before the summer recess.

There is enormous interest in the subject because action on it is so urgently needed. Since July, when we last debated the destruction of our wildlife sites, more than 100 sites of special scientific interest have been destroyed. Government statistics show that more than 2,000 sites have been destroyed in the past six years. When a habitat goes, the wildlife living in it declines also.

With such rapid destruction and degradation of our precious wildlife resource, there has been steady growth in public and political support for tough and comprehensive new laws. In August, in a poll conducted by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 65 per cent. of people said that they would like the Government to change the law, to give greater legal protection to wildlife. Additionally, 35 environmental and conservation groups—representing more than 6 million people—are now united in their desire for urgent environmental legislation. Furthermore, an unprecedented 351 hon. Members, from across the political spectrum, have signed early-day motion 11, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), showing their support for the passage of such laws.

With such clamour for wildlife protection, the Government's document, "SSSIs: the Government's framework for action", which was published in August, was most welcome. I am pleased that it was a Labour Government who, within a short time of being elected, consulted on the issue and produced such a document. Finally, we have a Government who have acknowledged that something needs to be done on the issue.

With such support, and the Government's document, there is now a very real chance of seeing wildlife legislation in this month's Queen's Speech. Many hon. Members, and millions of ordinary members of the public, will be watching and waiting for that to happen. However, they will be watching not only for legislation, but for tough comprehensive legislation.

Let us be clear about it: the opportunity to legislate on wildlife does not come along every day, and we have an opportunity to get it right. If we do not get the legislation right on this occasion, by the time we get another chance to try, in perhaps five or 10 years, we shall have lost many, if not all, of the sites that we are seeking to protect. If the legislation is not comprehensive, sites such as Thorne and Hatfield moors in my constituency will—to use rather unparliamentary language—have had it.

I welcome the framework document, but it is neither sufficiently tough nor sufficiently comprehensive. It contains, for example, no mention of measures to protect species outside SSSIs or at sea. It does not contain a legal presumption against development affecting SSSIs; nor does it mention an issue that is at the forefront of my constituents' minds—lowland raised peat bogs being cut up by an American multinational, bagged up and sold cheaply to gardeners to sprinkle in their pots. The word peat is not mentioned once in the document.

As I told the House in July, Thorne and Hatfield moors are part of the United Kingdom's remaining 6 per cent. of peat bogs—94 per cent. of which have been lost. Thorne and Hatfield moors are one of the United Kingdom's most vulnerable habitats. The moors comprise England's largest raised peat bog, and are home to 3,000 insects and 800 flowering plants. They are also vital to birds. I have a postcard from Helen Kirk—from the Thorne and Hatfield Moors Conservation Forum—showing a European nightjar, which is a summer visitor to Britain. The moors are internationally important to the survival of that species.

Such a location should be guarded as a national treasure, yet it is being plundered for its peat by a multinational organisation. Thorne and Hatfield moors are SSSIs. However, their old mineral permissions—granted in 1951, when much peat extraction was still done by hand—could not have anticipated the wholesale destruction that industrialised peat extraction would wreak.

Companies such as Fisons and Levington's, and now Scotts, have turned large parts of Hatfield moors into nothing more than a lunar landscape. The site is unrecognisable as an area that was once, 4,000 years ago, an integral part of a vast wetland stretching from the Humber estuary. Earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment described it as an intolerable situation. Yet, sadly, the situation would remain the same under any legislation based on the framework for action, as that document gives no indication of how the Government propose to move forward on the issue. Friends of the Earth estimates that there are still mineral permissions on more than 400 sites. We cannot ignore the issue.

The Government must seriously examine peat extraction, and conclude that it is not sustainable. Peat extraction is not economically significant to South Yorkshire. I have campaigned hard with my colleagues in Doncaster on regeneration, to create growth and jobs. I have also not made friends with some of the environmental groups, because I want Finningly air base to be transformed into a regional airport. However, that development will be on a developed-land site.

I am also working hard to discover how we can make the most of South Yorkshire's tourism opportunities. If we have enough vision, the number of jobs in that sector could be increased by opening the area to a major tourist attraction that visitors not only from Britain, but from around the world would like to visit.

In South Yorkshire, we are also working hard to embrace the information technologies and environmental technologies of the future. Our strength and opportunities for growth lie in those sectors, because of the nature of our area. Yorkshire has sound economic alternatives to peat extraction. Moreover, gardeners have sound horticultural alternatives to peat use.

Britain's gardeners will need persuading on those alternatives, and it is time for some of our current crop of celebrity gardeners to take a stand on the issue for the

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better. Geoff Hamilton—who was long the voice of gardening on the BBC—was totally opposed to using peat in gardens. We have to ensure that celebrity gardeners take their responsibility seriously. They have to accept that they have some responsibility for gardening's growing popularity—which, in recent years, has led to a fourfold increase in peat use. It does not help that gardening centres sell bags of peat for considerably less than they sell alternative materials.

I shall give an example of contradictions in the current SSSI arrangements, and explain the Natura 2000 proposals. Natura 2000 is a new status for areas of European conservation significance awarded under the habitats or birds directives, and could be part of the future of Thorne and Hatfield moors. However, in its infinite wisdom, English Nature—which, in 1997, proposed removing SSSI status from large parts of Thorne and Hatfield moors—has blundered again.

In 1997, English Nature's rationale for removing the moors' SSSI status was that parts of them had been worked for peat extraction; hence, the vegetation had been stripped, hence—in English Nature's logic—the moors were no longer either special or significant. I am pleased to tell the House that, with the help of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, English Nature bowed to public pressure demanding that Thorne and Hatfield moors be treated as an integral, whole and interdependent ecosystem that needed restoration and protection in law, not further destruction.

We hear now that, rather than submitting Thorne and Hatfield moors for Natura 2000 status, English Nature has redrawn the boundary to exclude the worked parts of Hatfield moors. Therefore, the provision to review the planning licences on the Natura 2000 site will not include the area currently being ravaged by Scotts. Consequently, we have a chicken and egg scenario, in which an entire area is covered by SSSI designation, but continued peat extraction is undermining the opportunity to take advantage of other environmental protection legislation to protect the entire moorland as one entity.

Once again, English Nature is playing politics with conservation boundaries. The action is driven not by science, but by a weak-willed desire to reconcile opposites. In so doing, English Nature has once again left a huge hole in the protective cloak that could have shrouded those precious wetlands.

The point of the Natura 2000 project was to confer millennial status. It demanded a look forward to the needs of wetlands 50 years ahead, not the nightmare creations of 50 years ago. I am afraid and disappointed that, by leaving out large sections of Hatfield moors, it is giving up on the moors. I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to comment on that.

I seek reassurances that the worked areas should be included in the review of planning licences. Not including them will make a significant statement about how the areas are viewed.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. Does she agree that, although the protection of SSSIs is a necessary precondition for the long-term improvement of the preservation of wildlife in this country, it is not the only thing that needs to be done? Does she agree that in any future wildlife legislation the importance of local nature reserves needs to be recognised? I should like to tell her about two important local reserves in my constituency, the Summerseat nature reserve and the Chesham woods area, both of which are managed by the Lancashire wildlife—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. That intervention was far too long.

Caroline Flint: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. As a constituency Member, my concern is about peat lands, but I am fully aware that others have constituency concerns relating to areas that are missing in the framework document. Local nature reserves, which involve local people and local communities, are an important part of sustainability and ensuring a future for valuable sites as we enter the next millennium.

It will take more than Alan, Charlie and Tommy to do a "Ground Force" makeover on Hatfield moor if it endures another five years of destruction. Until recently, the accepted wisdom was that were the Government to modify old minerals permissions, they would have to compensate the extractors on a profits forgone basis. That may be why the framework document did not address the issue.

However, there are two obvious problems with that approach. First, compensation payments would require an enormous commitment from the taxpayer, possibly millions of pounds per site. Secondly, paying such compensation would send out the wrong message about the public interest in the conservation of such sites. Why should the British taxpayer compensate an American multinational for not destroying one of our best wildlife habitats at Thorne and Hatfield moors? We would not compensate them not to demolish St. Paul's cathedral, so why compensate them for not destroying a peat bog?

In June this year, Friends of the Earth obtained legal advice stating that the Government could pay compensation that recognises only costs involved, not profits lost. That was based on the premise that any such action would manifestly be acting in the public interest. What consideration has been given to that legal opinion, which represents a good way to protect a precious site that is being destroyed relentlessly in the name of a quick buck?

I should also like an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that the Government are predisposed against peat extraction. It is not like coal, which served our industry well since the industrial revolution, or aggregates, which are needed for roads and buildings. We can live without peat for horticultural use. There is no partnership to be established, no common objectives, no business development that will not ruin the unique raised mires of Thorne and Hatfield moors.

One of the many letters that I have had from constituents on the issue was from Mark Paine, a local health care professional. He said:

> "For those of us that live around here and are privileged to know the Moors, the sight of our peat being taken away and sold as 'compost' to unwitting gardeners bamboozled by marketing spin cuts very deep indeed. Thorne and Hatfield Moors are places whose very existence in scientific terms truly contributes to the health of our environment, and therefore our ability to sustain healthy lives of our own."

Peat wetlands are the UK equivalent of tropical rainforests: precious, under siege, irreplaceable. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to take a hard look at Thorne and Hatfield moors and to listen to the concerns of my colleagues this morning about other aspects of the framework document. Please do not ignore the plight of that beleaguered SSSI site.

11.15 am

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on securing a further debate on SSSIs. I hope that these debates—as she said, we have had several in the past six months—will act as a spur to the Government and will not be seen as a substitute for Government action. Protecting SSSIs adequately becomes ever more vital as each day passes. Every day, an SSSI is destroyed or damaged.

Last week, English Nature published its annual report, which showed that one third of all sites of special scientific interest are suffering continuing damage and neglect. Last year, 8,300 acres of SSSI land were actively damaged. Rob Cooke, the manager of English Nature's SSSI project, says:

"What has emerged is that 28 per cent. of the natural features of our SSSIs are in poor condition and either getting worse or not getting any better."

He continued:

"Indications are that about a third of England's SSSI area of just over two and a half million acres comes into that category".

That is the equivalent of 750,000 acres.

The report picks out Whernside in North Yorkshire, where more than half of a 9,500 acre site of bog and heathland has been devastated by overgrazing. English Nature thinks that it could be restored with the right management, but there is no legislation to ensure that. One site—Horse Field in Gilling, North Yorkshire—has been destroyed.

To prevent any further sites being totally destroyed, we need legislation in the next Queen's Speech. Baroness Young, the chairperson of English Nature, agrees. She has said:

"Changes of legislation are urgently needed to ensure that these irreplaceable sites are properly managed for their wildlife and natural features."

She went on:

"Most of these SSSIs are suffering from neglect, but without the powers to ensure that these sites are managed for wildlife, English Nature is trying to work with one hand tied behind its back. It is frustrating because many of these sites could be improved by positive management, funded through English Nature's wildlife enhancement scheme. When we cannot achieve this management through partnership"—

this is the important point—

"we need to have additional powers to ensure that damage and neglect of these sites can be tackled."

Landowners also recognise that. In response to the Government's consultation, they have said that although

"deliberate damage was rare, where it occurred there should be appropriate means of dealing with it."

Species are suffering—not just the familiar, often mentioned ones such as the dormouse and the water vole, but others such as the black redstart, one of Britain's rarest birds. The recent loss of sites in London along the Thames to development has destroyed the breeding grounds of birds, despite their being recognised in the planning process as important wildlife areas. Sadly, some of the new developments have been stimulated by the building of the millennium dome. Perhaps that is not quite the right signal for the new millennium.

English Nature is not the only organisation to back further wildlife legislation. The Wildlife and Countryside Link—which brings together 22 environmental groups—is calling for legislation. As we have heard in previous debates, nearly 350 Members of Parliament have called for legislation and signed an early-day motion tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper). It seems that everybody is urging the forces of conservatism forward. Before the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) jumps up, we are talking about the forces of conservatism with a small "c".

Before the election, Labour promised greater protection for wildlife. That pledge is still in the Government's annual report, on page 79. Next to it are the words "on course". A consultation paper was issued in September 1998. Those words are of little help to sites such as Offham down or Rainham marsh, which have been damaged since May 1997, despite Labour's pledge. They are also of little help to the 11 wildflower meadows in Devon which *The Daily Telegraph* reported last month have been largely destroyed. For them, Labour's pledge of "greater protection for wildlife" is very much off course.

When the Government publish their next annual report, the words "on course" next to greater protection for wildlife will not be good enough; we have to see the word "done" instead. To deliver that pre-election pledge, the Government will have to legislate, and legislate well.

I wish to highlight a few issues surrounding the framework for action document. Liberal Democrats join others in welcoming what is in the paper. In legislation, such measures would go a long way towards delivering the Government's pledge, but not all the way. There are some significant omissions, some of which were referred to by the hon. Member for Don Valley. Given the difficulty in obtaining parliamentary time for such a Bill, we must make sure that we get it right first time. We cannot afford to be less than comprehensive, and then have to wait 20 years for another legislative slot.

There must be reform of the common agricultural policy, with a greater focus on positive environmental management and organic production. That must be better financial support for the management of SSSIs. This is particularly important given the state of agriculture, often described as being in crisis and often debated in this House. We need also to ensure not only that we give the powers to the new conservation agencies to protect wildlife, but that they use those powers. Government guidance and support must be strong to ensure that that happens.

We need to make sure that legislation protects not just SSSIs but other valuable wildlife sites as well. The London Wildlife Trust has told me that many rare orchids, butterflies and birds could thrive in churchyards and cemeteries across the capital if only they were given the chance. The same could apply to Wilderness island and Roundshaw downs in my constituency.

Mr. Chaytor: Does not it follow that, in any future legislation, the powers, responsibilities and budgets of the

[Mr. Chaytor]

county wildlife trusts need to be enhanced so that they can encourage biodiversity in the urban settings that the hon. Gentleman is describing?

Mr. Brake: That is the case, and resources are important.

As the hon. Member for Don Valley has said, we need to protect species in our seas and coastal areas. For whales, dolphins and porpoises around the UK the situation is far from satisfactory, and those animals are threatened by ever-faster boats and jet skis. They are not adequately protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and I understand that the position will be no better under the proposed legislation. The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society has raised the matter with the Government, and I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure hon. Members.

I hope that I and other hon. Members will have demonstrated that the case for legislation is clear and becomes more pressing as each day passes and another SSSI is damaged or destroyed. The Government will have the support of the whole House if they announce such a measure in the Queen's Speech this autumn. I urge them to do so, and to ensure that legislation is robust and comprehensive enough to stand the test of time.

11.23 am

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on securing this important debate on sites of special scientific interest. None of us should apologise for the frequency with which we bring these matters to the House.

For many SSSIs, it is already five minutes to midnight and, for others, sadly, the bells have tolled—they have gone. In years to come, we must not hear my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley asking, "Where have all the peat bogs gone? Gone to plant pots every one". That is the risk we face.

SSSIs are, without doubt, the very best examples of our natural heritage. The importance of their plants, animals or geological and physiographical features has led to those areas receiving the SSSI designation from English Nature. The 4,000 or so such sites cover 1 million hectares in England—4,000 precious and valued square miles.

Historically, a good deal of my constituency has been economically dependent on mineral extraction—including coal, clay, sand, roadstone and gravel. That era is steadily drawing to a close, and we are now restoring the tranches of derelict land in a variety of ways, prominent among which is the rapidly developing national forest—a remarkably successful project.

Former mining areas, such as my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley, have been environmentally scarred for generations. Our landscape and wildlife have not been seen traditionally as our strengths. We particularly value the relatively few SSSIs that we have, and we are especially sensitive about any damage to or loss of such sites.

As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) suggested, it has been estimated by English Nature that, nationally, 28 per cent. of SSSI aspects—those features of interest for which a site is nationally important—are in an unfavourable condition. There is either no sign of recovery, or they are declining even further. That should give us all great concern. Tighter legislation is essential to ensure that all SSSIs are managed so as to maintain to a high standard their particular features of interest.

We recognise that changing the legislative framework is not sufficient on its own to obtain the necessary improvements. We need a new policy direction, refined regulations and, above all, adequate resources. To obtain better management of SSSIs requires us to work in partnership with their owners and managers.

It is crucial to have the right mix of regulation and incentive to ensure that the major present benefits obtained by partnership working with land managers and owners are maintained. While many SSSIs are positively managed with the active help, goodwill and co-operation of their owners and occupiers, I regret to say that a substantial number are not.

It is time for the Government to legislate to deal with those cases. The present legal framework is unable to deal with SSSI damage arising from certain circumstances—for instance, third parties can badly damage SSSIs, or the sites can simply be neglected, with a consequent loss or decline of many species and habitats.

A major threat to SSSIs often arises when the owner or occupier activates an ancient planning permission which the modern planning framework would never have sanctioned. Owners and occupiers can, after giving notice, carry out damaging activities, preventable only if English Nature produces a management agreement with financial compensation for lost profits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley pointed to the dramatic weaknesses in that approach, and it is a costly diversion of resources from active nature conservation. In addition, particular difficulties occur on approximately 500 wetland SSSIs which depend on satisfactory management of the water tables on adjoining land. Many such sites are suffering from water pollution or abstraction problems. It is clearly essential to ensure that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food implements water level management plans on land adjoining SSSIs which will maintain the particularly valued feature of the sites.

There is no current requirement for the owners or occupiers of SSSIs to carry out that management which is necessary to maintain the key points of interest of the sites in question—a problem often of benign neglect. A positive management order—analogous to the order served upon the owners of listed buildings—has been suggested by some as a solution to the problem. Such an order would require owners to carry out the work themselves, or enable English Nature to do so and to recover the cost from the owner.

English Nature has publicly stated its belief that such orders would not be workable for SSSIs, since it would be hard to carry out practical management activities—many of which would be ongoing commitments—without the active co-operation of the owner or occupier concerned.

Will the Minister comment on the potential for a different type of positive management order, whereby English Nature could specify, through a site management statement, the work necessary to maintain the scientific

interest of the SSSI? If the owner's agreement cannot be obtained, even with appropriate assistance from organisations such as the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency, English Nature's council should be empowered to serve a positive management order requiring that the work be completed.

An appeal against the terms of such an order could be made to the Secretary of State by the owner. If the order was confirmed, the owner or occupier would have the choice of completing the works within an agreed time scale, with financial support from English Nature, or agreeing to voluntary sale of the land to English Nature or an approved conservation body. If the owner refused both those alternatives, compulsory purchase proceedings would be initiated, with an appeal process through the planning inquiry system and confirmation by the Secretary of State.

The attractions of that approach are that the same process of appeal could be used to resolve refusals to allow operations likely to damage the scientific interest of the SSSI and that such a system could eventually replace the present order under section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

There is a pressing need to reform the common agricultural policy so that payments are focused to deliver positive benefits for SSSIs and to discourage the intensive agricultural practices that have the most damaging effect on wildlife. Production subsidies should be redirected to protecting and managing special sites and the countryside, converting to organic farming or creating jobs in rural areas; direct subsidies to farmers should be conditional on sustainable farming, with protections for hedgerows, rivers and streams; and payments to beef farmers should be made under discretionary powers from the European Union to support traditional, low intensity herds, so as to maintain conservation grasslands.

I make a plea from the heart for much tougher planning guidance so that far higher hurdles must be surmounted before any developments on SSSIs are sanctioned. We should also consider revocation of old mineral extraction permissions that could damage SSSIs.

Those of us with constituencies that have suffered a great deal of despoliation are especially alert to threats to our SSSIs. When I reviewed the condition assessments and management prospects for 16 sites in my area, I found that of the 53 features of interest a bare 30 per cent. were in a favourable condition, compared with 56 per cent. nationally; 26 per cent. were in an unfavourable condition, but showing signs of recovery; and the remaining 44 per cent. were in an unsatisfactory condition, compared with 28 per cent. nationally. It was that high proportion of local sites suffering from benign neglect that prompted me to contribute to this debate.

A typical example concerns the SSSIs in Grace Dieu and High Sharpley: very attractive, important and valued areas just outside the urban fringe of Coalville. Parts of the areas have some public access and parts are closed by their owners to "protect the SSSIs"; yet an assessment of the sites shows that two thirds of their features are in an unfavourable condition that is not improving. Clearly, restriction of public access has not led to adequate protection for those important and sensitive sites. More has to be done.

Like every Labour candidate, especially those contesting rural or part-rural seats, I campaigned vigorously on environmental issues in the long run-up to the 1997 general election. Labour's policies, enabling the countryside to become ecologically richer, more varied and more accessible were, and are, especially popular. Those policies include our commitment to strengthening protection for SSSIs and other valuable habitats.

Like every Labour Member, I welcomed the announcement earlier this year by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment that he would deliver on that commitment by amending the 1981 Act, and I was encouraged by the Government's public consultation paper, "SSSIs—Better Protection and Management". There is strong cross-party support for better wildlife protection. Many hon. Members are signatories to early-day motion 11.

It is clear that the statutory conservation agencies need new powers and resources to tackle the worsening problems facing almost a third of SSSIs. There is an urgent need to act, and it would be popular, so what better time than two weeks from today, what better setting than the other place and what better means than the Queen's Speech? I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that the necessary powers and resources are made available very soon to prevent yet more deterioration of our national natural assets.

Oscar Wilde said that

"each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!"

Is not our nation at risk of allowing some of the things that we most love—SSSIs—to be killed by a method not mentioned by Wilde: benign neglect by their owners or occupiers? Is not it about time that we were brave enough to step in and prevent that?

11.35 am

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on securing this timely debate and I welcome many of her comments.

The subject of new Government action to protect our best wildlife sites has been debated several times this Session in both Houses, and an unprecedented number of hon. Members of all parties have given their support to early-day motion 11, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) last November. I wish that they were all here today for what is perhaps our last chance to debate this issue before the Queen's Speech.

We are nearing the end of this Session and all of us here today are optimistic that the next Session will see the introduction of new and far-reaching legislation to protect our wildlife. If so, the task will then be to ensure that it is as comprehensive as possible, because there is unlikely to be another major opportunity in the foreseeable future. Some, indeed many, matters may be dealt with by other means than primary legislation—by regulations and other policy measures to benefit the condition of wildlife—but stronger legislation is essential. We cannot allow the present rate of damage and destruction of sites and loss of species to continue.

[Mrs. Helen Brinton]

There was widespread welcome last August when the Government published their response to the consultation on sites of special scientific interest, known as the framework for action. It includes many vital proposals, such as nationally important status for all SSSIs; a duty on all public bodies to secure positive management of sites that they own or occupy; powers of entry to land for agencies such as English Nature for the purposes of surveying and monitoring and to determine whether an offence has been committed; court power to order restoration following damage; court power to impose unlimited fines; and the extension of local authority powers to refuse development on designated sites.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions—especial thanks are due to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for the Environment—has worked hard with a wide spectrum of interested groups to try to ensure that we get things right in the new legislation.

I am especially delighted that water companies have been asked to include in their business plans from next year measures to deal with the damaging effects of effluents and water abstraction, especially because the demand for water is likely to increase with the projected growth in the number of households; because my constituency is in an area of important rivers and wetland sites, including the Nene and Ouse washes; and because there is evidence that the three counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire have less wildlife per hectare than almost anywhere else in the country.

I was very glad to read in the framework that the Government recognise the need to provide adequate funding to underpin other wildlife protection measures. We know that many of the problems affecting wildlife habitats today, and SSSIs in particular, are not due to direct destruction—wilful vandalism—by development, as happened in the past. Most public bodies, landowners and farmers do not set out deliberately to damage the sites that they own or manage. The damage is more often a result of neglect, which may in turn be a result of special agricultural practices, and is often related to inadequate or inappropriate funding mechanisms.

Landowners are, and most regard themselves as, the rightful stewards of the countryside, and they need support for that role, such as financial incentives—carrots, not just sticks. There should be much more support for what are called agri-environment initiatives, including subsidies such as that for countryside stewardship, which is very popular with farmers although there is not enough money to meet the demand. I say that with the Minister listening. At present, only 3 per cent. of CAP money is spent on such schemes. The Wildlife and Countryside Link, with which I have been proud to work in recent months, reckons that figure should be 30 per cent., which would provide scope for major environmental improvements.

It should be rewarding for farmers to spend their time conserving our wildlife in the interests of us all. In any case, we cannot achieve conservation without the active involvement, support and engagement of farmers. We need copper-bottomed legislation, but we need the right incentives and funding, too.

The otherwise excellent framework document has a serious omission—as serious as that of mineral extractions highlighted at the beginning of the debate. I am especially concerned that, as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) said, no proposals have yet been made to protect marine mammals, such as whales, dolphins and porpoises, from harassment. The seas around the United Kingdom are home to more than 20 different species of cetaceans, as those animals are collectively known.

Research conducted by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, of which we have heard today, has shown that cetaceans are threatened by accidental capture in fishing nets, chemical pollution, noise pollution and other disturbance by vessels of their habitat. Some of that, ironically, may be due to the great interest in and affection for those animals felt by many of us humans. They are known to be highly intelligent, they have often appeared to reciprocate our interest and they do not pose any threat to us. In consequence, there has been a great interest in boat-based whale and dolphin watching in recent years, and I am convinced that that requires some form of regulation with a statutory underpinning, if we are not to end up damaging or destroying the subjects of our admiration through our neglect and thoughtlessness.

Less forgivably, increasing evidence is emerging of deliberate harassment of cetaceans, especially dolphins, in coastal waters. *The Sunday Times* has highlighted the campaign against the use of jet skis to chase dolphins. The riders of the jet skis may mean to chase the dolphins, but not mean to hurt them. Many people think that dolphins can swim fast enough or dive deep enough to escape the vessels chasing them, but jet skis can travel at speeds of up to 70 mph whereas a dolphin's top speed is about 35 mph and it cannot keep that up for long. Also, dolphins are of course mammals and therefore have to come up to the surface to breathe every few minutes. They are especially vulnerable when they have young calves with them.

Several measures are urgently needed to provide effective p[illegible] for cetaceans in UK waters. First, powers of [illegible]ment should be extended. At present, powers are held only by the police, but most of the offences against marine species are—not surprisingly—committed at sea where there are no police. It therefore seems common sense to give similar powers to other agencies which can enforce the provisions of existing and any new wildlife legislation. Secondly, sanctions should be increased. We need effective deterrents—sticks as well as carrots—including powers to bring prosecutions, powers of arrest and penalties for offenders.

Thirdly, the concept of recklessness should be more widely introduced into wildlife law, as in the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 which was introduced by the previous Administration. As I have said, most people do not wish or intend to harm dolphins and whales, whether they go on trips to watch them or even if they chase them on jet skis. Perhaps most people, if they understood the serious risk of harmful consequences of such actions, would stop them.

Under UK law, a person is reckless if he or she commits an act which to an ordinary prudent individual would appear to involve an obvious and serious risk, whether it is because they are thoughtless, or, having recognised the risk, they carry on regardless. I believe that where a nature conservation agency has notified that an

action is likely to harm a protected species, failure to act on that information should give rise to an offence of recklessness. Therefore, what we must do here in Parliament is to amend the existing legal protection in order to make it an offence intentionally or recklessly to disturb protected species of animals, including all cetaceans. An alternative approach would be to provide more specifically to make it an offence to harass any cetacean, combining that again with the concept of recklessness.

The Government plan a marine review, and I welcome that, but the need to protect the wonderful creatures that we are so fortunate to have in the seas around our islands is urgent and I believe that we should use the opportunity provided by a new wildlife Bill—which I desperately hope to see included in the Queen's Speech—to address that urgent need.

11.46 am

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on introducing this debate. Unfortunately, we should point out that almost all Opposition Members have failed to turn up, let alone contribute this morning. The SSSIs are important to every constituency, and I would have thought that a better attendance from Opposition Members would have ensured a good debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I wish to make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that this is an Adjournment debate and the only people who must be present are the occupant of the Chair, the Minister and the hon. Lady who initiated the debate. It is not necessary for any other hon. Member to be present.

Mr. Hoyle: I am sure that you would agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is desirable for hon. Members to consider SSSIs and the future of wildlife in this country. The SSSIs are one of the most important factors in the protection of the countryside and wildlife, but, in the past 18 years, we have seen developers encroaching on them. That will always continue, because the greed for a little bit more will always exist. The feeling is that development on an extra small piece of land will not make any difference, but protection is needed against such encroachment.

A new challenge for the new millennium should be to provide solid, reliable protection for SSSIs and wildlife for the future. If such protection needs a new name, let it have a new name. We should seriously consider how we write such protection in stone, so that it cannot be nibbled away at the edges. It should also be easier for SSSIs to be listed, because we have already heard of how small pieces of land, whether in cities, towns or rural areas, may not fit into the category of SSSIs. The definition should not be so strict or regulated, and any piece of land should be included as long as it is worthy of protection. We should make it easier for people to obtain designations for land, and the protection that listing as SSSI gives should be afforded to all our constituencies, no matter how large or small the piece of land concerned. The main point is that a site should be worthy.

In addition, we must recognise that wildlife in the countryside needs protection. The best way to provide that is through a national rangers agency. The question of resources is always important, but those rangers could look after SSSIs and country parks. By linking up with the national parks, they could offer true protection.

I am lucky in having part of the West Pennine moors in my constituency. That beautiful area is owned by North West Water, which itself is now part of United Utilities. There is nothing wrong with the arrangement: the company spends money on rangers and on ensuring that there is protection for wildlife.

More than a million people a year want to visit the part of the moor that is in my constituency. I do not want to tell those people that they cannot go there, as I think everyone ought to be able to share that beautiful countryside. However, what will happen if a French or American company snaps up United Utilities? We will then have to rely for that area's protection on an overseas company that does not understand the requirements of the countryside.

That is why I believe that the area would benefit from being declared an SSSI. We failed to achieve that in the past, but we could lose the protection afforded by the present owners overnight. I hope therefore that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider new ways to protect for future generations the countryside and the rural wildlife habitat that we love.

It is easy to look backwards, but we should look to the future and to the provision of further protection for the countryside. Extra funding will be needed. Farmers throughout the country are having a really tough time. However, given that no alternative funding for wildlife protection is available outside the assisted areas, farmers in those areas could be hired as part-time rangers. That alternative income would mean that they would not have to rely entirely on farming, as they would be employed to protect our countryside, wildlife habitats and SSSIs. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider how such a scheme might be implemented, by his and other Departments.

I am sure that in every constituency there is at least one application for a licence for commercial exploitation—for the extraction of minerals or of peat, for example—to which the first response is always to say no. I recognise that roads and houses have to be built, but no new licences should be granted unless a genuine need exists, and unless existing licences are taken into account.

A licence application has been submitted for a huge sand extraction facility at the village of Euxton in my constituency. However, the sand from a similar facility not far away is being stored because no one wants to buy it. The real value lies, not with the minerals extracted from such sites, but with the resulting hole in the ground, which can be filled with household or industrial waste.

Licence applications for mineral extractions should be refused if similar facilities exist within a 25-mile radius. Companies should be told that they cannot attempt to get a hole in the ground through that means. Existing licences should have to be shared, and the resources involved should have to be exhausted before new licences are granted. That would be a clear indication of the Government's determination to protect the countryside, and it would reassure the villagers of Euxton that those who want to make a quick, cheap pound out of a hole in the ground will not succeed.

[Mr. Hoyle]

I know that the Government will not fail the people of this country, or SSSIs, or wildlife. Unlike the previous Conservative Government, the Labour Government will be able to go into the next general election with their head held high.

11.55 am

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on securing this morning's debate. I apologise that I was not here for its start, but I could not change a commitment of long standing. However, I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute a few comments.

The events of a couple of years ago at Offham down, at Lewes near my constituency, first made me aware of the vulnerability of sites of special scientific interest. The farmer there decided to plough up an SSSI on his land, to take advantage of the common agricultural policy's financial subsidy scheme. Who could blame him? However, local people decided that his action was not right, and turned out in force to replace the soil as soon as the farmer's plough turned it. Eventually, action was taken to restore that site.

That brought home to me just how vulnerable SSSIs are. I know that the Government intend to introduce legislation to protect them—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and other Ministers, have told me so. It is merely a matter of when such legislation will be brought in.

About a year ago, I introduced my Wildlife Bill into the House. Like most other private Members' Bills, it did not get very far, but it received a heartening level of support among hon. Members. For example, 349 hon. Members have now signed early-day motion 11, supporting my Bill and the wildlife charter proposed by a number of relevant organisations.

Moreover, the provisions that I have suggested and about which we have heard this morning also have support across the country. Earlier this year, the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) and I delivered to Downing street a quarter of a million signatures collected from people who wanted to urge the Government and Parliament to introduce stronger wildlife protection legislation.

We have heard this morning about some of the omissions from the Government's framework for action document. I welcome that document, which contains many of the elements that I included in my Bill. However, the Government have not made a commitment on the matter of marine protection, which my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) mentioned. There should be a greater emphasis on local wildlife sites, and more attention needs to be paid to the vulnerable land around the SSSIs.

Many habitats will disappear if action is not taken now. At present, 28 per cent. of SSSIs are in a state of neglect, and many of the species familiar in our countryside will not survive for future generations to enjoy. Given the present system of agricultural subsidies, we need to offer financial incentives for the good management of the sites. We need carrots as well as sticks.

Other hon. Members may not agree, but I do not consider that there is a contradiction between campaigning for wider access to the countryside and for environmental protection. I have previously mentioned the beautifully named Drencher bottom, Well bottom and Big bottom on the south downs. They are not areas of special scientific interest, but they are of interest to anyone concerned with wildlife. Those areas have suffered intense neglect which was discovered, I fear, only when some local ramblers trespassed, as they should not have done. I urge the Minister to be sympathetic to the calls made to him this morning. I hope that the Queen's Speech will include the required legislation.

12 noon

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on securing the debate, and I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), to his new role. He will have realised that many of us are veterans of these Wednesday morning discussions of sites of special scientific interest, of which there have been many during the past few months. He may have to clear his diary on Wednesday mornings for many months to come as they are a regular feature. I welcome the Minister not least because the sight of him at the Dispatch Box after what he will agree has been one of the more tortuous journeys up the greasy pole gives hope to us all. I am delighted to see him make it.

Like many hon. Members, I hope that we are moving towards legislation. Last time we debated SSSIs, in July, the Minister for the Environment had been on the "Today" programme campaigning for legislative time. I, like others, understand that he has been successful in that, and I certainly hope that he has. The delay in taking steps to protect SSSIs and other areas of great wildlife value has been damaging.

Other hon. Members have given figures this morning, and the Minister will know that about 300 SSSIs are being damaged every year. Half of them are in unfavourable condition, and many suffer from neglect. This century, 134 species are known to have become extinct, and the rate of extinction is about three species every two years. SSSIs should obviously be used to protect our most endangered species, and the importance of early legislation is clear.

The hon. Member for Don Valley said that she hoped for early action, drawing a contrast with the previous Government. I should gently remind her that the previous attempt to deal with the problems was the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which was introduced during the second full Session of the Conservative Government, who saw the matter as an urgent one.

Caroline Flint: That Act, which was enacted by the Conservatives, has done nothing to stop peat extraction on the site to which I have referred and on which damage continues. The very problem that I am seeking to address is the failure of previous legislation to control peat extraction, and ultimately to put an end to it.

Mr. Green: We all accept that the 1981 Act, which updated previous legislation from the 1940s, needs itself to be updated. But the Government's framework document says that the new proposals would not wholly replace the relevant provisions of the 1981 Act. There is a tendency to say that that Act did no good at all, but that is not so.

I hope that the Government will end the damaging delay of the past two years or so. A feeling has got about that the Government always want to be green tomorrow, but not quite today. I hope that we have finally reached the stage when they will fulfil their promises.

Having said that, the Opposition agree on the ends of any new legislation affecting improvement to SSSIs. I have several questions for the Minister, and some concerns about the scope and practicalities of any Bill. First, on the scope of the Bill, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) has mentioned access, which is an area of legitimate concern. The Minister will be aware of the dangers of including access provisions in the legislation. They would make a Bill more controversial, which would be likely to delay its passage, and that would be regrettable. Any proposal to extend access must not pose a threat to wildlife; most walkers and ramblers behave responsibly, but the Minister will acknowledge that it takes only one irresponsible person to damage a habitat, possibly irreversibly. I hope that such concerns will be uppermost in his mind as he prepares the Bill.

The Wildlife Trusts have made a number of good points on access, saying that a

"distinction must be made between access on foot for quiet enjoyment and access for other recreational pursuits that are more disruptive to wildlife".

The trusts add:

"Agencies should have the power to close (permanently or temporarily) areas or close or divert rights of way, if . . . access is having a significant affect on the wildlife or habitat."

The trusts also make the good point that there

"should be wide-ranging consultation before access to other areas of open country are agreed."

Those are sensible proposals, and it would be interesting to hear how the Minister's thinking is developing on that important aspect of any legislation.

Other bodies have raised concerns about whether access on open land will be linear only or more wide ranging. What practical measures will be taken on the control of dogs? That is a matter of great concern both to those who own farm animals and to those concerned about such issues as ground-nesting birds, because decisions on the control of dogs have the potential for directly damaging SSSIs, which would undermine the many good intentions of the Government's framework for action.

My second area of concern is the balance between partnership and enforcement. I welcome the framework's words about the Government's preference for voluntary agreements where possible. However, enforcement powers will clearly and necessarily be taken, and it would be useful to hear more details about those powers or the principles that will underlie them. When would they apply? What powers of entry on to land does the Minister envisage? How should they be enforced? The Minister will accept that the long-term management of SSSIs and other land benefits from a positive relationship between regulatory bodies and landowners. That is the best way in which to have land managed sensitively in the long term.

The right of appeal mentioned in the Government's proposals also raises some questions. The appeal would be to the Secretary of State, but when a dispute arises between a public body that reports to the Secretary of State and a private individual, the individual may not feel that justice has been served. Have the Government considered any alternative way in which to resolve disputes?

My next area of concern is funding. The hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) mentioned that matter, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has said that the

"nature conservation agencies do not currently have enough funds to deliver the proposals"

that the Government have made. The RSPB estimates that

"£20 million is required for this in England alone"

but adds that that sum is

"insignificant when compared to the agriculture subsidies which have often led to the demise of many sites in the first place."

Can the Minister tell us whether the resource implications have been thought through?

A significant role in the protection of wildlife—specifically SSSIs—is played by existing agri-environment schemes such as the countryside stewardship scheme. It would be interesting to know whether any expansion was envisaged for those schemes, which have proved so useful.

The next subject of anxiety lies outside the SSSIs—I refer especially to the land that adjoins them. That land should not be developed unsympathetically. The Minister will know of examples of planning developments near a protected SSSI that render it much less useful. I refer the Minister to our previous debate this morning about development in the south-east, and to yesterday's debate about greenfield sites. Many Labour Members, especially the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson), welcome more development on green fields in the south-east of England because they believe that the new houses are likely to be occupied by Labour voters. I hope that the Minister will deprecate the environmental vandalism that some of his hon. Friends seem to advocate, which would adversely affect SSSIs. The argument about green fields in the south-east and in the rest of the country will continue. It has a direct bearing on this debate.

The framework for action may not provide sufficient protection for areas of outstanding natural beauty and locally designated protection zones, which were mentioned earlier. The World Wide Fund for Nature claimed that the framework did not constitute a way forward either by providing a legal basis for the biodiversity action plan or by helping the marine environment, which the hon. Member for Peterborough mentioned.

Let us consider the Natura 2000 sites. The Government have been told that they have not done well enough and their list has been sent back. The World Wide Fund for Nature believes that there should be up to 1,000 special areas of conservation under the Natura 2000 programme. Why have the Government proposed so few sites, which would be a great addition to the web of support that we can provide for wildlife and general species protection?

I am worried that the framework ignores the role of the common agricultural policy, which other hon. Members have mentioned. Any discussion must take place against the background of the current CAP's failure to pass many sensible environmental tests. The way in which land is farmed is probably the most important influence on the future environmental health of the land and the species that live on it. Agricultural practices are supremely

[Mr. Green]

important. The Berlin negotiations on the future of the CAP failed in many ways: they did not help the consumer or the farmer. They also failed the environment.

The CAP must move—albeit gradually—towards a different sort of subsidy. Subsidising production alone is an out-of-date concept. It distorts the market for food and is out of date because it fails to protect the environment. I suspect that we shall have to continue to subsidise those who look after the land for the foreseeable future, but the largely urban public would be much happier to pay taxes to subsidise farmers to buy environmental goods rather than simply to subsidise production. That point did not come across in Berlin, and I hope that the Government will address it in future CAP negotiations.

The Opposition will welcome sensible proposals; a wide consensus will support sensible and practical moves to protect wildlife. As long as the Government stick to sensible and practical policies, we shall not try to obstruct or delay legislation. I hope that legislation based on the framework will hold to those principles.

12.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Chris Mullin): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) for initiating a good debate, to which Members on both sides of the House made thoughtful and positive contributions. People of all political persuasions are concerned about SSSIs; the extent of the support for the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) shows the strength of feeling in the House.

I shall do my best to address as many as possible of the points that were made in the debate. As is often the case in such debates, I must hastily edit my contribution. Therefore, I am unlikely to reach all the points that were raised. I shall respond in writing when necessary.

The Government have a good story to tell about SSSIs and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley for the opportunity to relate it. I shall deal briefly with the points that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) made. The hon. Gentleman asked about the scope of the Bill. This is not the place to go into detail or to discuss the right to roam. However, any threats to SSSIs do not tend to come from ramblers.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the balance between partnership and enforcement. I agree that that is a delicate matter and that it is preferable, when possible, to have a positive relationship with the owners of the site. However, any policy must include enforcement powers if it is to be taken seriously. We shall consider that carefully.

The hon. Gentleman asked about funding. It always warms my heart to hear an Opposition Member demanding that more public money be spent. The Government have already allocated an extra £6.14 million to English Nature. If we decide to grant more money in due course, we look forward to the Opposition's support. The development of greenfield sites is much debated. It has some relevance to SSSIs, but we cannot consider that this morning.

The debate has focused on the protection of special sites of scientific interest. I understand that emphasis. We need to pay particular attention to the conservation of those important sites that constitute some of our most precious areas for wildlife, harbouring rare or endangered species and providing the habitats where they can flourish. The Government have given priority to drawing up proposals that we believe will provide for better protection and management of SSSIs. They are the 5,000 or so sites in England and Wales that constitute the best areas for nature conservation and have been designated by English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales as containing nationally important species and habitats.

Many SSSIs are well managed and in good condition, and I pay tribute to those owners and managers who have taken account of the environmental significance of their land, and enjoy a constructive relationship with the conservation agencies. However, we have to recognise that too many special sites are wantonly damaged, and, in many cases, they are not in good health.

English Nature already aims to increase the proportion of sites that are being positively managed for conservation, and to reduce the proportion that are in an unfavourable condition. As I said earlier, we have already provided additional resources to English Nature in the current financial year to assist that work, and we expect long-term benefits. However, we recognise that more needs to be done to encourage that process and provide the best framework in which it can operate. For those reasons, my Department published a consultation paper on sites of special scientific interest last September. It contains significant proposals to help deliver real improvements in England and Wales in the immediate future. Many hon. Members referred to it today. We followed that in August with the statement, to which hon. Members have also referred, that sets the framework for legislative and other action by Government.

On legislation, our proposals have covered a range of options. The sites are diverse, covering a huge range of habitats and special features, and they are subject to a variety of pressures. More than half the sites are in good shape. The problems that we face in perhaps a quarter of those sites are also diverse. We have consistently emphasised that better protection and management must be secured by changing our approach in several areas, including policy, administration, law and finance. However, the framework for action is clear in spelling out the legislative changes that must be made.

Mr. Brake: Obviously, I do not expect the Minister to reveal what is in the Queen's Speech, but does he expect that, in next year's annual report, the word "done" will appear against commitment 115 which relates to greater protection for wildlife?

Mr. Mullin: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the priority that the Government attach to their programme is a matter for finer minds than mine. They are wrestling with the problem even as I speak. However, the Government take the issues seriously, as I hope to demonstrate if I get the time to do so.

We have proposed new powers for the agencies, the most significant of which will allow them, for the first time, to refuse consent for damaging operations. There would be a right of appeal against refusal, but no expectation that the agency would be obliged to offer compensation for activities for which consent is refused. I believe that that answers some of the points raised by my hon. Friends.

We shall also provide the agencies with new powers to combat neglect and to address management issues, so as to secure the positive management that delivers conservation benefits. My hon. Friend the Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) asked about positive management orders on SSSIs, and our new powers to combat neglect anticipate the procedures that he mentioned, including powers for conservation agencies to draw up objectives for positive management on a site and to make an order requiring action to be carried out, subject to appeal to my Department.

We shall introduce increased penalties for damage to SSSIs, and increased powers to require restoration. We shall also introduce additional powers to deal with third party damage, where greater powers and better enforcement are necessary.

We shall provide the agencies with additional powers of entry to land, and more flexible powers to purchase SSSI land compulsorily, although we envisage that both those provisions would be needed to be used only exceptionally. We shall emphasise the responsibilities of public bodies towards special sites and we shall also propose amending the financial guidelines on management agreements issued under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, to move further away from compensating managers for not damaging sites and towards paying for positive management. That deals with another point that has been raised.

We are absolutely clear that further legislation is needed to underpin partnerships and to provide better means of addressing problems. We have proposed significant new powers for the conservation agencies. However, deliberate damage is rare: what we need to address is neglect and unsympathetic management, which is a bigger problem. Legislation alone will not solve all the problems, and we will be looking for a range of other options to deliver our objectives. The National Assembly for Wales will, in many cases, be responsible for deciding how to proceed in Wales.

The majority of sites remain in agricultural use, so that our overall policies for agriculture, including the development and implementation of agri-environment schemes, remain of fundamental importance. The overall outcome of recent negotiations on common agricultural policy reform, to which the hon. Member for Ashford referred, represents a small step—I shall not make too much of this point—in the right direction. It has potential benefits for the environment generally, and for sites of special scientific interest. The Government have consulted widely on the implementation of optional elements of CAP reform in the United Kingdom, including attaching environmental conditions to subsidy payments, and modulating payments to provide additional savings for a limited number of environmental and structural measures.

A significant number of SSSIs are also in wetland habitats, and are often listed as Ramsar sites of international importance, or they may be affected by issues concerning the quality and availability of water resources. We are fully aware of the public concern over the effects of over-abstraction of water from wetlands. We have asked water companies to include environmental and quality improvement programmes costing around £8 billion in their business plans for the years 2000–05, including measures to deal with the adverse effects of effluent or over-abstraction on 102 SSSIs.

The debate today has also referred to several other matters, including, for example, planning and development. We confirmed in the framework document that we would clarify planning policy guidance to reflect the national importance of sites of special scientific interest, with a strong presumption against development that would significantly affect the sites. The test has already been introduced, in relation to trunk roads, through the transport White Paper. We propose issuing for consultation a revision of planning policy guidance note 9 on nature conservation and planning next spring.

In the short time left to me, I shall deal with the questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley about Thorne and Hatfield. She graphically expressed her concern about several sites, but especially about Thorne and Hatfield moors in her constituency. Let me emphasise that we acknowledge the international importance of the best examples of our peatland resources. They will be included in the Natura 2000 series, through which we deliver our obligations under the European Union's nature conservation directives, or they will be listed as Ramsar sites—wetlands of international significance.

The habitats regulations will also require a review of all extant permissions and consents—including planning permissions that were granted prior to their inclusion in the list of candidate special areas of conservation, or their classification as a special area of protection for birds, under the birds directive. Where the review, which will be carried out by the local planning authority, concludes that the integrity of the site is likely to be adversely affected, the consent will have to be modified or revoked, unless Ministers decide that an imperative reason outweighs the conservation interest.

Caroline Flint: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mullin: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will not, because I have a lot more to say about the points in which she is interested. I shall do my best to say as much about them as possible, although I may have to write to her about some matters.

We drew attention to those obligations and associated procedures in our statement of 12 May 1998. Where permission is revoked or modified, there is an entitlement to compensation, and the Government have indicated that they would consider reimbursing the local authority where compensation costs were high. We have sought advice from English Nature on the effect of existing permissions on a number of international sites and are considering that carefully.

Part of Thorne moors is already a candidate special area of conservation and English Nature is giving further consideration to whether it should be listed as a Ramsar wetland. I am also pleased to confirm that, in the last few days, English Nature began consulting owners and occupiers about the classification of parts of Thorne and Hatfield moors as a special protection area for birds. We shall seek to reach an early decision, once consultations are completed and we receive its report. Classification of the site as a special protection area for birds will inevitably lead to a review of the permission under the habitats regulations.

In addition, the Government are urgently considering ways of expediting reviews on candidate special areas of conservation in the light of the continuing delays in the

[Mr. Mullin]

process, to which I have already referred, for drawing up a final list of sites for the Atlantic biogeographical region, of which the United Kingdom forms a part. I cannot say more about that today, but I hope to be able to do so very soon.

I now come to the subject of peat. Wider issues—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am afraid that the Minister will have to write to his hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on the remaining points. His time is up. We now come to the next debate.

Hospital Waiting Times (Avon)

12.30 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): In desperation, I have initiated a debate on orthopaedic out-patient waiting times. I feel able to achieve something for my constituents on many of the topics about which I receive letters, but on this subject, I feel helpless.

In the few years that I have been a Member of Parliament, I have received a stream of letters, telling me of increasingly outrageous waiting times. I do my best—I write to the trust, to the health authority and to the Government—but, every month, the letters keep coming. Therefore, I am grateful for the opportunity that the debate gives me to raise the issue of where the buck stops—with the Minister of State on behalf of the Department of Health.

I start with a brief excerpt from a letter from a general practitioner in Yate in my constituency, who copied to me his letter to the Secretary of State dated 18 October. It reads:

"I have an 81 year old patient who was referred for an Orthopaedic appointment in June 1998 . . . he . . . heard nothing . . . We . . . phoned the hospital who told us that"

the likely date for his

"appointment was April 2000; he will have therefore waited 22 months."

That gentleman will have to wait 22 months to see a consultant, perhaps to be placed on a waiting list. I have written to all the bodies involved. All express concern, but little happens.

I shall cite two cases that show how people on the ground are experiencing these delays. My constituent Mrs. Evans, a civil servant from Chipping Sodbury, now gets around on crutches because of her orthopaedic problems. She would like to stop work because of the pain that she is in, but she has received a letter saying that she will have to wait 78 weeks to see a consultant. She cannot afford to take 78 weeks off work, so she is getting by by working part-time, in pain. She told me that she feels betrayed because she paid national insurance when she could and now, when she needs the system, it is not there.

I told Mrs. Evans—admittedly, with some trepidation—that 78 weeks was a relatively short wait. It did not help her to hear that 104 weeks was the norm, and that 78 weeks seemed a step in the right direction. However, as the chief executive of the relevant trust wrote to me about Mrs. Evans,

"waiting times for orthopaedic outpatient appointments . . . continue to be unacceptable."

The trust does not deny that. The chief executive was

"delighted that the Trust was able to appoint a 5th orthopaedic consultant",

as a result of which waiting times have come down from 104 to 78 weeks. The chief executive says:

"I . . . acknowledge that a reduction in waiting times from 104 weeks to 78 is scant comfort for the patient,"

and that there is a health authority problem. She says:

"the area served by Avon Health Authority is under-resourced in terms of orthopaedic surgery".

Ominously, she continues:

"however, there are no resources earmarked for further investment in orthopaedic services, and there are no plans to provide additional capacity for orthopaedic outpatient appointments."

Therefore, waiting times have shortened slightly, but, this summer, the trust chief executive told me that it was a health authority problem, and that there were no plans for extra investment. When we write to the trust, the trust does its best, but says that the health authority is responsible.

Having seen that waiting times were shortening slightly, I was shocked to receive a letter from a constituent, Mrs. Aze, who sent me a letter from the trust, saying that she would have to wait not 78 weeks and not 104 weeks, but between 115 and 125 weeks—nearly two and a half years. Mrs. Aze says:

"I am approaching 70 years of age . . . my GP . . . considers that I am in need of an examination in the near future to prevent me from becoming a cripple . . . It is obscene to send . . . a letter to a patient who has been referred to you for ACTION",

saying that it will be 125 weeks before she is seen.

Mrs. Aze has found out that it would cost £8,000 to obtain a private operation. She cannot afford that. She has been told that she could get a private consultation to skip the 125-week wait, and then wait for an NHS operation, but the health authority, understandably, does not encourage that because, although it would solve one person's problem, it would not tackle the underlying problem.

Not surprisingly, the Aze family wrote to everyone that they could think of. On 29 October, they wrote to the previous Secretary of State. He did not reply, of course; he passed the letter to the south-west region of the national health service executive. Its parliamentary business officer wrote:

"how sorry I was to read about your wife's wait for an outpatient appointment . . . The Government sets a standard waiting time of 26 weeks".

We all fell about when we heard that, because it is nothing like the experience of real people. The letter continues:

"clearly North Bristol NHS Trust are not keeping to this target,"—

we had noticed that—

"so I will refer your letter to"

the chief executive of the health authority. For what?

"I will ask her to write to you with an explanation for the delay".

So the constituent writes to the Government, assuming that the Government have a hand in the matter. The Government pass the problem down to the regional branch, and the region says that the trust is not performing and that it will ask the health authority to explain why. Understandably, the constituent feels slightly dissatisfied with that response.

I know that action is being taken. The health authority has set up an investigation into out-patient waiting times, which will take 12 to 18 months to complete. Why is that only now being done? I was elected two and a half years ago, and within weeks was receiving letters saying that out-patient waiting times would be 104 weeks. Why has the subject only now acquired urgency? Why did not the investigation start two years ago?

In August, I received a letter from Avon health authority. We seem to be exchanging many letters on the topic. After telling me about all the money that the Government are putting in, which does not seem to be making much impact, the geographical director of the health authority says:

"monitoring of the service agreement between ourselves and the . . . Trust shows an under-performance of 2,203 new outpatient attendances. We remain in very close dialogue with the Trust on this issue."

I would like to be a fly on the wall and listen to that dialogue.

However, let us get this straight. The trust says that Avon health authority area is under-resourced in terms of orthopaedics—which is true, given the number of orthopaedic consultants per head of the elderly population. Therefore, the trust says that the authority is part of the problem. The authority says that the trust is under-performing. The Government say, "We will get the health authority to write to you to explain why the trust is not performing".

My plea is, will someone, somewhere, take responsibility for this disgraceful situation? I have been writing these letters for two years, and two years is a fairly typical wait in my authority area to see a consultant. I am impatient for action. My constituents are impatient. That is why I have raised the topic today.

Where do we go from here? What does the future look like? This morning, I spoke at length to the chief executive of North Bristol NHS trust. She tells me that the case of Mrs. Aze has moved on considerably. She tells me that Mrs. Aze was told that she would have to wait between 115 and 125 weeks because she had been referred by her GP to a specialist orthopaedic surgeon; that she has now been placed on the list of the fifth orthopaedic surgeon—who, I understand, is more of a generalist—and that therefore she will wait not 125 weeks, but perhaps 25 weeks. I should like to think that her waiting time has been shortened by 100 weeks as a result of my intervention, but I doubt it. However, that does not change the underlying issue.

In response to my debate, and in response to my publicly raising the issue locally, the health authority still admits that 70 weeks is a typical wait. Although Mrs. Aze was an extreme case of someone who wanted to see a specialist orthopaedic consultant, and although this individual case is nearer resolution than it was, Mrs. Evans and many other people are still no nearer resolution.

What of the future? The new Secretary of State has said that heart and cancer treatment is a priority for him, and of course those issues are vital to people who are affected. Are those new priorities to be funded from a fixed cake?

I know that the Government can tell us about the £21 billion; we can all argue whether that is a meaningful figure. There is money going into the health service, but does the designation of heart disease and cancer priorities mean more money for those specialties, and not less for the rest of the NHS? Or is money to be directed from less glamorous parts towards those high-profile and important concerns? If the latter is so, will orthopaedic waiting times in Avon rise rather than fall? Yes, heart disease and cancer matter, but if funding for them will come from a fixed overall cake, will the unglamorous be left behind?

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): That is stupid.

Mr. Webb: The Minister says that that is stupid, but we must be clear whether the Government's declared new priorities are to be funded at the expense of other parts of the NHS, or whether new money, over and above the amount that had already been announced when the new Secretary of State took his post, has been found. If it has not, the less headline-grabbing, glamorous priorities will be left aside.

[Mr. Webb]

What do my constituents have in common? What about my 81-year-old constituent about whom the GP from Yate wrote, or Mrs. Aze, who is nearly 70 years old? Are elderly people who need routine operations such as hip operations to be forced to wait for years and, in the words of Mrs. Aze, left to become a cripple?

This debate is about out-patient waiting times in Avon, not just orthopaedic services; there are many more horror stories. I plead with the Minister to spare us from bombardment by a raft of statistics on all the money that is being invested in the NHS. We have heard it all before. My constituents hear it on the television time and again, and write to me asking, "What do these people know?" We are told that waiting times are falling, but I receive letters about 70 or 100-week waits, and about how my constituents must either take a year and a half off work or wait two years at the age of 70 or 80 for treatment. Such matters need urgent attention.

My plea is for the Minister to accept that the buck stops with him. The trust has been investigated several times by the Government and various departments, but its consultants are working their socks off. There is no suggestion that they are not pulling their weight. Indeed, the trust chief executive suggests that some may be working too hard.

When will people waiting for orthopaedic appointments in the Avon health authority have to wait only 26 weeks? Will the Minister please tell us today when he expects the Government's target on orthopaedic out-patient waiting times to be met? Will he accept responsibility for the NHS—not blame the trust or the health authority, but accept that the buck stops with him? Will he ensure that, the next time that someone writes to his Department about such problems, they are not fobbed off and told how concerned the Government are, but how somebody else has been asked to explain? I have no answer for my constituents when they ask why they must wait 100 weeks to see a consultant just to be put on a waiting list. I have no answer; I hope that the Minister does.

12.43 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on securing a debate on a subject of great importance to his constituents. I shall cover the Government's overall waiting list policy, and the measures that we are taking nationally to improve patient access to NHS services, and then look at the level of Government investment in both the national health service nationally and the Avon health authority, and the measures that are being taken in Avon to reduce the number of patients who are waiting longer than 13 weeks to see a consultant.

It is important to say at the outset that I recognise, as everybody does, that waiting a long time to see a consultant is distressing and worrying for patients and their families, particularly if people are in pain. That is why we as a Government are committed to tackling out-patient waiting times. As the constituency cases that the hon. Gentleman brought to the attention of the House make clear, Avon health authority has major problems with long out-patient waits in certain specialties. Considerable effort will have to be made to address that problem. In fairness, it is important to emphasise that the extremely long waiting times that he raised are the exception. The average first out-patient appointment waiting time is the same as that in Avon health authority: seven weeks.

Waiting times and lists are a key concern of NHS patients, which we recognise. In modernising the NHS, we are determined to make access to services faster and more convenient. We are committed to reducing both the number of people waiting and the time that they wait. We are working to improve access for all NHS users.

We are also introducing important, special measures for patients for whom rapid access to the NHS is vital, such as those who are suspected of suffering from one of the big killers of modern times—cancer. The new focus on diseases such as cancer and coronary heart disease that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced is within the context of achieving our targets for waiting lists and waiting times. It is not an alternative.

Yes, of course all that we do in the NHS is funded by the resources that we make available to it, including the additional £21 billion investment. However, it is right for us to set our overall aims—as we have very clearly on waiting lists—and, within that, to make clear our targets.

It was disappointing that the hon. Gentleman had nothing to say about the hard work of staff in Avon. As he will know, we have already instituted a two-week wait for patients who are referred urgently with suspected breast cancer. The Avon health community has responded marvellously to the challenge of meeting the breast cancer waiting targets. The whole health community can be proud of the out-patient waiting list. In the first quarter of this year, 100 per cent of patients were seen by a consultant within two weeks when the urgent referral was received from the GP within 24 hours.

The hon. Gentleman would have painted a fairer picture of the work of staff in Avon health community had he referred to that considerable success. The staff are excellent, and I am sure that, when the two-week wait for urgent referrals is extended to cover all cancers next year, Avon will once again be among the leaders in achieving that standard.

We have tackled in-patient waiting lists: the list has fallen by 200,000 over the past year, and is now 69,000 below the level of March 1997. We are on track to achieve our manifesto commitment to reduce waiting lists by 100,000 from the level that we inherited.

This year, we are applying the same determination and good practice to reducing waiting times for out-patients. Last year, NHS trusts saw 175,000 new out-patients. This year, we expect the NHS to see more than a third of a million more new out-patients. That will mean that, in 1990-2000, more than 11 million new out-patients will be seen—for the first time in the history of the NHS.

In September, following a top-level meeting with NHS staff and Health Ministers, the Prime Minister announced a package of measures to tackle out-patient waiting times, including a £30 million boost to out-patient services, tough new monitoring of performance and the extension of the booked admissions programme.

Money from the £30 million waiting lists and times performance fund will go directly to the NHS to help tackle out-patient waiting times. It will allow the NHS to focus on tackling problems locally, providing additional

out-patient clinics, employing additional staff and investing in new medical equipment. It will also help to fund sustainable solutions, modernising out-patient services and access to the NHS.

The national patients access team, which this Government established, is in the lead in taking forward such initiatives. It is providing intensive programme management for the booked admissions programme, and runs a visit programme to advise trusts and health authorities on how to reduce waiting lists and times and ensure widespread adoption of best practice. I understand that NPAT visited North Bristol NHS trust and made several suggestions, which the trust is beginning to implement. It is also assisting in the review of orthopaedic services across Avon.

The booked admissions programme is part of the Government's on-going commitment to modernise the health service, to make it more dependable, and to enable the NHS of the future to provide immediate access to dependable health advice, same-day testing and diagnosis, and prompt and convenient access to care and treatment.

We announced the first wave of 24 booked admissions pilot schemes in September 1998, with an investment of £5 million. A further £20 million is being invested this year in a significant expansion of the programme. The Royal United hospital in Bath was one of the hospitals in that first wave, and has received an NHS beacon award for the excellence of its pilot scheme.

In September, the Prime Minister announced a further 60 new pilot sites, taking the total number of people benefiting from the programme to 2 million. Three of those schemes are in Avon—at the Weston Area NHS trust, the North Bristol NHS trust and the Royal United Hospital Bath NHS trust. Since that announcement by the Prime Minister, the programme has been extended to cancer services in order to streamline services and minimise delays for patients with suspected or diagnosed cancer.

Cancer services in Avon, together with those in Somerset and Wiltshire, will benefit from an additional £500,000 to develop a scheme for booked admissions. That will enable patients whom their GP suspects of having cancer to receive the earliest possible appointment with a specialist. It will avoid delays between different treatments and enable care to be carefully co-ordinated.

As I mentioned, to underpin the Government's programme for the modernisation of the NHS, we are spending more than ever before on the health service. The comprehensive spending review provides £17 billion for the NHS in England over the next three years. That is the biggest cash injection in the history of the NHS.

The money is now reaching local health authorities. Avon health authority will this year receive £582.5 million—a cash increase of £36.5 million or 6.69 per cent. That gives Avon the highest level of growth in the south-west region, and includes almost £5 million from the modernisation fund specifically to target waiting lists. In addition, the health authority has received £5.6 million in targeted funding in areas such as staff recruitment and retention, mental health, cancer waiting times and nurse prescribing.

We are not neglecting the fabric of the NHS. As part of the largest capital programme in the history of the NHS, it is forecast that the total capital spend in Avon will be more than £83 million. That includes £2.64 million from the modernisation fund to improve the accident and emergency departments at all the major acute trusts in Avon.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I pay tribute to the staff of the NHS in Avon, who last year treated 11,331 more elective cases than in the previous year, an increase of 11.9 per cent. They also dealt with a growth in the number of emergency admissions of 3,800 or 4.5 per cent.

However, there is no doubt that Avon's performance in certain specialties is worse than that of the NHS as a whole. I am happy to acknowledge that Health Ministers must take responsibility for what happens in the health service, but, in the delivery of services, there is a huge responsibility on everyone working in the NHS in Avon to work together to tackle the problems and bring the standards in Avon up to the levels achieved in other parts of the country. We will support Avon through the national patients access team, the finance and additional measures that I have set out and the booked admissions programme, but it is the local NHS that must deliver.

As I stated at the start of my speech, the health authority and the trusts recognise that the current position is unsatisfactory. This year, the health authority and trusts have planned to reduce substantially the number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks for an appointment. Although the problem of long waiters is common to all the major hospitals in Avon, it is most marked in the United Bristol Healthcare NHS trust and the North Bristol NHS trust.

I can confirm that in the case of Mrs. Aze, who was sent an appointment date of 125 weeks, her consultant wrote to her GP on 19 October and she will be seen by another consultant with shorter waiting times.

On the position in the key hospitals, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that there has been a new management team at the North Bristol NHS trust since its creation earlier this year. We are looking to the team to provide a clear management lead in tackling the problem of long lists. The trust has already taken various steps to improve the position. Extra staff have been appointed and extra clinics are being established. Additional measures have been and will be taken to reduce the number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the Minister and I do not want to interrupt his flow. I hope that in the remaining four or five minutes, he will address my specific question. When will the target waiting time of 26 weeks for out-patient orthopaedic appointments be hit in Avon? Given all that the Minister has said and all the money that he told us is being put in, he must be confident that that target will be hit soon. When?

Mr. Denham: There has been a long period of poor service and underinvestment, which has led to the length of waiting lists that the hon. Gentleman described and which I acknowledged. My priority, which must also be the priority for the trusts and those working in them, is to get a grip on the problem and to make sure that waiting times are reduced. I shall set out the measures through which that must be done. We start from a position that is worse than that experienced in the NHS as a whole. People working in the health service in Avon must get a grip on that.

[Mr. Denham]

Various measures have been and will be taken to reduce the number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks. For example, an additional two new consultant clinics per week in general surgery have been established at Frenchay hospital, with additional clinics at Southmead hospital.

In orthopaedics, which is of particular concern to the hon. Gentleman, the North Bristol NHS trust has appointed a new consultant and will use money from the performance fund to appoint additional physiotherapists as clinical assistants. The trust has also agreed low back pain referral protocols with GPs to allow direct referral to a physiotherapist, rather than to a consultant.

In ophthalmology, another problem area, a new consultant has been appointed from October this year. A new locum consultant gynaecologist appointment is being made from January next year. It is intended to use money from the performance fund to develop plans to provide four nurse practitioner-led clinics a week doing minor procedures to release consultants to see additional out-patients. A new staff-grade doctor in ear, nose and throat is being appointed from January. New clinics are being established in plastic surgery, rheumatology, dermatology and neurology, some of which it is intended to support through the use of performance fund moneys.

The trust is examining various measures to improve the way in which out-patient services are provided and to ensure that the best use is made of out-patient clinics by reducing the number of non-attenders and by filling vacant out-patient slots. The trust is engaged in discussion with other NHS trusts identified as "beacons" for good waiting list management to ensure that the trust identifies best practice and applies it to the local situation.

The United Bristol Healthcare NHS trust intends to increase activity in ophthalmology, dermatology, neurology, dental specialties and ENT. This activity will be targeted at long-waiters. The trust is working with local primary care groups and considering the increased use of physiotherapy screening for orthopaedic out-patients to ensure that patients are seen by the most appropriate professional. In addition, the trust is working to ensure that its management of out-patient appointments process is in accord with best practice.

Orthopaedics is the specialty with the longest wait to see a consultant. Over the past five years, the Avon health authority has invested an additional £5.1 million in improving the orthopaedic service. As I said, the health authority is conducting a wide-ranging review of orthopaedic services across the Avon area to inform its funding decisions for next year. It will be assisted in that by the national patients access team.

In conclusion, I believe that action taken by the Avon health authority and the local NHS trusts will lead to a reduction in the number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks and, more importantly, a reduction in the maximum length of time taken to see a consultant. Current times are far too long. The regional office of the NHS Executive has carried out an assessment of the action plans prepared by the health community, and is satisfied that the waiting list objectives will be met. We want patients in Avon to wait less time to see a consultant in future, and will continue to work with the local NHS to achieve that aim.

Health (Lowestoft)

1 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I shall start with a rather grisly fact. If one lives in certain parts of Lowestoft one has a 60 to 80 per cent. greater chance of dying before the age of 75 than the average individual living in Suffolk. That fact is contained in the 1999 report of Suffolk's director of public health. That is a shocking statistic for those who live in the two wards concerned as well as for the whole town of Lowestoft, the county of Suffolk and anyone who cares about health inequality. It reveals what is meant by the term "health inequality".

The director has made it clear in his report that there is a strong association between high death rates and deprivation. The two wards, together with a ward in central Ipswich, have the highest standard mortality ratios in Suffolk. They also have the highest levels of deprivation and the highest number of people on income support—about 25 per cent. The director's report tells us that Lowestoft as a whole has the highest premature death rate of any town in Suffolk and that it is significantly above the Suffolk average. All the information and statistics in the report are based on research from the years 1995-98.

Unfortunately, this is nothing new. In the director's 1997 report, which was based on statistics from the years 1987-95, the same three wards were at the top of Suffolk's standard mortality ratio. The report begins:

"Overall, Suffolk people are amongst the most fortunate residents of this country when it comes to health—or at least to death! In any one year a Suffolk resident of any age has, on average, an 8 per cent. lower chance of dying than the average individual of the same age living in England and Wales."

However, the report goes on to say:

"This encouraging overall picture for Suffolk does, however, conceal some marked variations in death rates within the county . . . The three most deprived wards in Suffolk . . . have deprivation levels akin to those found in many inner city areas of the UK's big cities. They also have the most significantly high SMRs in Suffolk and the highest levels of unemployment . . . If you are amongst the 10 per cent. of the population living in the wards in Suffolk with the highest death rates you are almost twice as likely as the 10 per cent. living in the best wards, to die before age 75."

The director was so concerned that he called the report, "Time for action".

Sadly, and unacceptably, as I have pointed out, the 1999 report reveals that things have not improved and that, if anything, they have got worse. I spoke to the director this week and he is concerned that things my have got worse. The SMR for the Kirkley ward was 143 in 1997 and it is now 184. The SMR for the Harbour ward was 138 in 1997 and is now 164.

I have looked at other figures from the Office for National Statistics, which allows primary care groups to compare their death rates. It uses a measure known as the death, age, sex standardisation rate. Those figures show the Lowestoft PCG area substantially higher than all other Suffolk PCGs.

We see the same inequalities in mental health. The director's 1999 report shows that Lowestoft's standard admission rate for psychiatric specialties is 131. The next highest is Ipswich with 109 and the lowest rate in the county is 77. Again, the director confirms the link with deprivation.

Health inequalities such as these are immoral and unacceptable, even more so when one lives in a community that is at the wrong end of the statistical table. I am pleased that this Government are the first Government to make one of their two overall priorities the reduction of health inequalities to narrow the health gap. Few communities will appreciate that more than Lowestoft. However, if it was time for action in 1997, people want to know why things have not improved in 1999. What has happened?

I have looked at Suffolk's health improvement programme. The first programme is just a catalogue of what has been happening, but we must recognise that it will take time for health authorities to develop their programmes. As they are developed in the future, they will need to be more focused on specific priorities for addressing health inequalities, with a clear strategic direction.

It is clear that we need a two-pronged approach. First, we must tackle the causes of ill health. The Kirkley area of Lowestoft has been designated a single regeneration budget area. That funding is being used for a healthy Kirkley initiative, drawing together public bodies carrying out community based work. There is improvement in housing conditions and enhancement of the physical environment. A training centre is up and running to help youngsters back to work. That partnership has put in a bid to the new opportunities fund for a healthy living centre. If it is not against protocol, I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), will support the bid.

There is some public disquiet about the rate of progress, but we must recognise that multi-agency work takes time. The new deal is making an impact in Lowestoft, as is the minimum wage legislation, and we fully expect the working families tax credit to help. We had excellent news this summer when the Government awarded Lowestoft assisted area status and designated it as a European objective 2 area from 1 January. All those initiatives will be a huge boost to the employment prospects, economic recovery and future prosperity of the people of Lowestoft. However, it will take some time for them to have an effect, so we must look at the second prong.

Like crime and the causes of crime, while we are dealing with the causes of ill health, we must ensure that the resources are available to treat the existing high levels of ill health. People in Lowestoft have asked whether the director's reports have influenced the spending patterns and distribution of resources in Suffolk. The answer seems to be not at all. The current allocation of resources within the county does not match or relate to the health inequalities. That is a sore point in my constituency. The director reveals that clearly with regard to mental health services in this year's report.

Government policy could not be clearer. The document entitled, "The New NHS modern and dependable" states:

> "The healthcare needs of the population, including the impact of deprivation, will be the driving force in determining where cash goes. There will be a national formula to set fair shares for the new PCGs as there is now for health authorities. It will be for health authorities to determine the pace of change at which individual PCGs within their area should move towards their fair share."

So far in Suffolk I have seen no such movement.

Suffolk health authority has said that the budgets are tight and difficult. It is not easy to take resources from one part of the county to give to another. Let us be clear. Suffolk health authority has had above inflation rises in Government cash awards. In 1998-99, it was 4.14 per cent. and in 1999-2000, it is 5.5 per cent. It had extra money for the winter difficulties in 1997. It has had extra money for waiting lists and a good share of the modernisation fund. However, it has had only the basic rise in its annual revenue allocation from Government. It has not had any discretionary rise because, as a whole, Suffolk is relatively healthy in national terms. The Suffolk average SMR is 7 to 8 per cent. better than the national average. The Suffolk average for deprivation is quite low.

Government policy is to give greater uplift in resources to the more deprived health authorities to narrow the inequalities between them. The problem faced by Lowestoft is that it is an area of high deprivation suffering huge health inequalities in an otherwise better-off county. How will the Government ensure that their philosophy of addressing health inequalities through differential funding is replicated within a health authority? Is there an allowance for Lowestoft's deprivation currently included in Suffolk health authority's settlement? If so, how much is it? Is there monitoring to see whether that money is directed towards Lowestoft? The authority appears to use an historic roll-over budget rather than redirecting resources. I know that the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), when he was the Minister of State, wrote to Suffolk health authority about the issue in February 1998.

Before coming to the debate today, I consulted a number of health professionals in Lowestoft. The commonly held view is that the gap has got worse rather than better. Resources were directed towards an acute hospital in another part of the county that had particular problems.

In my discussions, I discovered that there are mounting problems with mental health services. There is restricted access to cognitive behaviour therapy for patients with ME and chronic pain, restricted access for victims of sexual abuse and young people to support and advice services, and, alarmingly, reduced access to the Waveney alcohol and drugs service. That is worrying, as there is a drugs problem in the area to which I have referred.

The plan to develop the locally available renal dialysis service at the local hospital has been abandoned. As a result, some people will have to make the 60-mile return journey to Norwich three times a week for dialysis. That is uncomfortable for any patient, and transport is a particular problem for those suffering deprivation. If my hon. Friend the Minister has not been to East Anglia, I can tell her that 60 miles on East Anglian roads is far worse than 60 miles in other parts of the country. The abandonment of the plan to develop local renal services poses a great problem for my constituents.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): Is my hon. Friend aware that Norfolk and Suffolk health authorities planned to improve the renal unit at the James Paget hospital, the benefit of which is enjoyed by both our areas? The inability of Suffolk health authority to raise that revenue has scuppered that plan, whereas Norfolk

[Mr. Anthony D. Wright]

health authority has introduced proposals that benefit the people who use the renal service in Norwich and at the James Paget hospital.

Mr. Blizzard: My hon. Friend is right. The James Paget hospital has an admirable policy of providing services for both counties. It wants to treat the two counties equitably, but the failure or inability of Suffolk health authority to fund the renal service means that people in both our constituencies are suffering.

We now have a worse problem. Suffolk health authority is undertaking a planning exercise to prepare for a 2 per cent. budget cut across the board to deal with its deficit and in anticipation of its expected settlement for 2000-01. How can we have a 2 per cent. cut and record levels of expenditure through the £21 billion extra money that the Government are putting into the health service? The two are incompatible. Someone will have to explain to people in Suffolk how that can be. Will the Minister look into this matter?

Will the basic increase that Suffolk health authority is expecting be inadequate to cope with unavoidable rising costs, bearing in mind that it is expecting only the basic uplift? Or is the projected deficit the result of stored-up, longer-standing budgetary problems that pre-date this Government? Whatever it is, people in my area will be dismayed if we suffer a 2 per cent. cut. I ask the Minister to look into how that problem can be overcome and consider a financial remedy.

Even if there has to be a 2 per cent. reduction, it should not be across the board, because then the inequalities in Suffolk would be perpetuated. Government policy requires health authorities to narrow the gap, so how can a reduction be imposed on hard-pressed general practitioners and on the primary and secondary services in Lowestoft that deal with the highest levels of ill health in Suffolk? The policy demands a re-routing of resources in Suffolk to deal with the findings of the director of public health in successive reports. Even with the tightest budget, there must not be an across-the-board response.

Government policy on reducing health inequalities is just what we need in Lowestoft, and it is vital that it is implemented. The new Health Act 1999 gives the Secretary of State new powers to ensure that it is. Will the Minister look into the issues that I have raised, and help Lowestoft to receive its fair share of resources: the share that the appalling statistics and Government policy determine that it should have?

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on securing this debate and on raising the issue of health inequalities, which is a matter of great concern to the Government. He is a powerful advocate for his constituency, and has drawn attention to the problems faced by his constituents in Lowestoft.

The Government are strongly committed to tackling health inequalities. Under the previous Government, health inequalities were barely mentioned, never mind tackled, and the idea that they might be linked to poverty, unemployment or the wider inequalities in society was anathema to them. The result was that, when we came to office, we inherited a society in which the health gap between rich and poor had continually grown. My hon. Friend makes that case powerfully when he talks about his constituents.

One of the first actions that the Government took was to commission an independent inquiry into health inequalities. Sir Donald Acheson reported that, although average mortality had fallen over the past 50 years, unacceptable health inequalities persisted, and many measures of health showed that inequalities had either stayed the same or had grown and widened in recent decades.

Health is too much of a local lottery. Surrey man can expect to live on average 11 years longer than Manchester man. For women, the difference is nine years. The problem is not just about where people live, but about who they are. Their chances of dying young are significantly higher if they are working class than if they are middle class. The unemployed are twice as likely to suffer from depression as those in work. High blood pressure, smoking and obesity are more prevalent among the low skilled. People in substandard housing are at greater risk of cold and damp. Death rates from coronary heart disease among people living here but who were born in south Asia are 46 per cent. higher for men and 51 per cent. higher for women than the rates for England and Wales as a whole.

People on low incomes are not only more likely to get ill, but are less likely to get the treatment that they need. The highest numbers of heart operations are not in the areas with the highest rates of coronary disease. People in poorer areas are less likely to survive cancer than those in more affluent areas.

In Lowestoft, the pattern is similar. Kirkley and Harbour wards have higher than average unemployment and crime rates. They also have the highest premature death rate, and Kirkley has the highest out-patient referral rate in Suffolk. Those wards also have a 29 per cent. higher rate of emergency admissions than the average for Suffolk. Lower job opportunities, lower incomes, higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse, social exclusion and poverty all take their toll compared with other parts of Suffolk.

My hon. Friend is right when he says that such health inequalities are immoral and unacceptable. They are as unacceptable to the Government as they are to him. In Lowestoft and across the country, the Government are committed to tackling this unfairness.

I want to talk about the action that we are taking to tackle health inequalities, and to try to answer the points made by my hon. Friend. He is right that we need to tackle the underlying causes of ill health, whether it is poverty, unemployment, poor housing or other problems that cut right across every Department, not just the Department of Health. That is why we are raising the income of families with children through the working families tax credit, raising child benefit and the child premium for income support.

The working families tax credit provides extra help to 1.4 million families. Families with children and someone in full-time work will have a minimum income of £200 per week. The Prime Minister has said that we must end child poverty in a generation. We have a long way to go, but these are important steps along the way.

To cut unemployment, we have invested £5 billion in the new deal programmes. We are investing £450 million in sure start to help vulnerable children to make the best possible start in life. Sure start brings together early education, health services, family support and advice to families in low-income areas with children under the age of four.

The Government are also working to tackle pensioner poverty. We are providing a new minimum income guarantee for pensioners worth at least £75 per week for a single pensioner and £116 for couples this financial year, and a winter fuel payment of £100 for every pensioner household. As many pensioners on low incomes will know, sitting in a cold house because they do not have the money to turn up the heating is not good for their health. We are also investing in our poorest communities through projects such as the new deal for communities, the single regeneration budget and sure start. The most powerful way of tackling the ill health of some of our poorest communities will not just involve the health service; it will involve reducing the poverty that caused the problem in the first place. That is why the Kirkley regeneration initiative described by my hon. Friend, which has secured single-regeneration funds for the area, is so important. Its purpose is to tackle local unemployment and deprivation.

All the programmes that I have mentioned will help to tackle some of the underlying causes of ill health. My hon. Friend is right to say that it will be a long process, but we must make a start, and we must do it now. We also need direct action to tackle health inequalities, which is why the Government are currently developing initiatives such as health action zones, healthy living centres and health improvement programmes to improve the health of communities.

One of the programmes in Lowestoft is the "healthy Kirkley" initiative, a community health project which brings together the local NHS trust, the community health council, Waveney district council, Suffolk county council and the local primary care group. Together, those bodies are trying to deal with the symptoms that are so often related to deprivation: depression, isolation, low self-esteem, stress and asthma. The partnership is addressing community needs directly, organising, for instance, a Saturday morning drop-in centre for young parents and a scheme enabling unemployed people to be trained through the renovation of local housing. The initiative will obviously be strengthened by the bid for a healthy living centre, to include the wards of Kirkley and Harbour. My hon. Friend made a powerful case for that bid, and I am sure that the message will be passed on. There are further schemes to deal with the problems of older people, smoking, misuse of drugs and other substances, and domestic violence.

Let me say something about programmes in Suffolk as a whole. The alliance for health in Suffolk, financed by Suffolk county council and Suffolk health authority, has established a healthy schools project to promote a health ethos and environment in schools. The project has links with mental health, coronary heart disease and stroke prevention groups which, as part of the health alliance, aim to reduce health inequalities. All those local partnerships are examples of programmes that we must promote and make effective throughout the country if we are to have an impact on the root causes of ill health and health inequality.

We must also consider what our health services can do more directly. That applies to health authorities, trusts, primary care groups and other health partners. My hon. Friend expressed anxiety about the allocation of resources to Suffolk health authority, the distribution of resources in Suffolk and the impact on inequality. I can tell him for a start that the Government have commissioned a review of NHS resource allocation, which is now under way. A key objective is for the way in which resources are divided across the country to contribute to a reduction in avoidable health inequalities.

The Government believe that resources for health care should go where needs are greatest. At national level, we take relative need into account when allocating money to health authorities, so that we can distribute more additional resources to the areas in greatest need. Last year, all health authorities received a minimum increase of 1.67 per cent., and additional growth funds were aimed at the health authorities in greatest need.

As my hon. Friend said, Suffolk health authority received a 5.5 per cent. increase in its budget this year, which represents a real increase 2.9 per cent. in its power to spend money on health services for people in the area. That compares with real increases of 1.35 per cent. last year, 1.9 per cent. in 1997, only 0.5 per cent. in 1996, and a mere 0.06 per cent. in 1995, under the last Government. Suffolk has received funds from the modernisation fund for waiting lists, mental health treatment, lung and colorectal cancer and information technology.

I am aware that the health authority is running a deficit this year, and is now planning how to recover its balance by 1 April 2000, which it is required to do by the regional office. How the authority allocates its resources to achieve that balance must be a matter for local discussion; nevertheless, I expect the authority, the primary care groups and all the local health partners to take account of health inequalities and deprivation during that discussion. I am very interested in what my hon. Friend said in that context, and I will pursue the matter.

I understand that the 2 per cent. mentioned by my hon. Friend is not an across-the-board cut. If he wants to discuss that further, I shall be happy to talk to him, because, as I have said, I believe that health authorities must take account of health inequalities.

Health authorities, including the Suffolk authority, are now expected to take account of such inequalities, and to draw up plans for improving the health of local populations. This is the first time that all health authorities have led the preparation of comprehensive and cross-sector health improvement programmes. My hon. Friend asked what the Department could do to ensure that the programmes included action on health inequalities and areas of deprivation. I can tell him that the Department will provide guidance on the setting of local targets to measure progress in the reduction of health inequalities, and on assisting health authorities.

I understand that the development of Suffolk's health improvement programme involved health services, social services, education and housing services, and many of the other agencies and groups involved in health issues. The plan of action for improving health in 1999-2000 has identified health inequalities as one of its five priorities, the others being coronary heart disease, cancer, accident prevention and mental health. Those are important aspects of the national health strategy, which will have a considerable impact on the health of Suffolk residents.

[Yvette Cooper]

The primary care group in Lowestoft is concentrating on health inequalities and mental health issues. It is currently working with key stakeholders to produce a primary care investment plan, which I understand will be finalised soon. Taken together, the health improvement programmes and the primary care investment plans should deliver a comprehensive range of targeted measures to tackle health priorities both countywide and in local communities.

The Government are also taking broader action across the NHS, which should help to tackle health inequalities not just in Suffolk, but throughout the country. The decision to place cancer, heart disease and mental health problems among our top priorities also constitutes an attack on health inequalities. After all, the people who are most likely to die prematurely of cancer, or to have heart attacks under the age of 65, are those on low incomes. The death rate from coronary heart disease is three times higher among unskilled men than among professionals.

We have charged the new cancer director, Professor Mike Richards, with assessing the wide variations in cancer care and cancer survival rates across the country, and with drawing up a strategy to end the national lottery in cancer care. It simply is not fair that where a person lives, or who a person is, should affect the treatment that that person receives, as well as his or her chances of getting cancer in the first place.

My hon. Friend asked what the Government could do nationally to raise standards in every area. The national service frameworks that we are currently developing to deal with coronary heart disease, mental illness, the problems of older people and diabetes will reflect the need to tackle inequalities, and will ensure that national guidance will enable every area to improve the health of its population.

Tackling health inequalities will require determination on many fronts. For too long, the main problem has been securing official recognition of those inequalities. The NHS will be a key player, but not the only player. We shall have to work in partnership with other organisations; but the Government are absolutely committed to ensuring that everyone has a fair chance of leading a healthy life, regardless of where they live and regardless of social class, ethnicity and gender. That means tackling the causes of health inequalities, but it also means modernising our health services, so that the NHS becomes a truly national service in which patients can have fair access to consistently high quality and prompt treatment throughout the country.

We have a long way to go if we are to reduce health inequalities in Britain, but we are making plans in order to start making a difference now.

Newtown Common

1.30 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I welcome the opportunity to raise the issue of the ownership of Newtown common. Until recently, the subject would not have generated much public interest, but, because of the activities of a property dealer trying to get people to part with substantial sums, the ownership of the common and the obscure and outdated legislation that surrounds it deserve the House's attention. No one should have to go through what my constituents are going through.

I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box. He brings with him a well-earned reputation for fighting for justice, often against long legal odds.

The debate is about a battle between 180 constituents who live on, or around Newtown common, and Bakewell Management. Just over 100 houses are involved, which are located on, or near the common. They are owned by owner-occupiers—not all of whom are well off—who bought the houses having undertaken all the usual searches through solicitors. Not one search revealed any liability of the type that is now claimed. Since time immemorial, they have driven the short distances to and from their homes to the main road.

One typical couple bought their house in 1971 and have been driving to and from it ever since. They paid off the mortgage in 1991. The husband is 70 years old. His wife is 61. Both have retired. The value of the house is now estimated to be £180,000. They have little capital.

Mr. Merton Vaslet, who is aged 80, has lived in his house and used the Newtown common roads for 36 years. He is quoted as saying:

"I have crossed Newtown Common quite happily until now. Then I'm told I don't have access to my own home".

Dr. Stevenson, another home owner who has used the common roads for 28 years, said that residents were prepared to go to the High Court to block the claim. Others have lived in the area even longer; one lady moved there more than 60 years ago. At no stage had any of them been invited to pay any money for accessing their homes—until a few weeks ago.

Let me introduce the second party—Mr. Michael Farrow and his company, Bakewell Management. In 1986, a company named Historic Records Agency, whose managing director is Mr. Farrow, bought the title "Lord of the Manor of Newtown" from the Earl of Carnarvon for £4,200. Mr. Farrow proceeded to remove a reference to wastes and commons in the conveyance and sold the title for £12,000. Claiming ownership of Newtown common, he transferred it from the Historic Records Agency to himself and then to his wife, who in turn transferred it to a company named Bakewell Management. That company now claims ownership of the common and has applied to the Land Registry to validate that.

Mr. Farrow tried to register the common with the Land Registry in 1988, objections were made in 1990 and the application was cancelled in 1995. However, in July 1997, Mr. Farrow reapplied. On 15 April 1999, an advertisement was written by the Land Registry offering14 days in which to lodge complaints. Should Mr. Farrow be successful in his application, he will claim to have the

authority to start to charge people for something that they cannot avoid doing, but have never had to pay for before: getting to their own front door.

Mr. Farrow wishes to charge residents who use the common to get home a fee for the privilege. He is demanding 6 per cent. of the value of their home. What is even worse is that his chartered surveyors, a company named Deal Varney, which has since resigned from the case, had given the residents an ultimatum. I quote from a letter to residents:

"we are instructed, under the terms of the amnesty, the owners will accept 6 per cent. of the open market value providing agreement is reached before the 15th November 1999".

Bearing in mind the fact that Mr. Farrow is yet to be registered as the owner, residents have to decide between paying him 6 per cent. of the value of their homes by 15 November, and standing their ground, risking the fee rising to 10 per cent. or more—a figure was mentioned in the same letter. Many of the residents cannot afford such a sum and will be forced to sell and move elsewhere. The practice might have been appropriate from the feudal sheriff of Nottingham. There is no place for it in 1999.

I am delighted that the residents have joined together in an association that is led by Tim Kelleher. I am grateful to Doug Ellis, to his wife Liz, who is the clerk of the parish council, and to Councillor John Clegg, who represents Newtown Common on Basingstoke and Deane district council, for all their support in mobilising a campaign to oppose Mr. Farrow.

What is the legislative foundation of Bakewell Management's claim? Is it valid? If it is, should the law be changed? Section 193 (1) of the Law of Property Act 1925 states that, if a deed of public access is signed by the owner of the common, that allows the common to be publicly used for "air and exercise". The signing of the deed automatically triggers a ban on vehicles passing over the common, unless the landowner expressly gives permission.

Under the Road Traffic Act 1930, it is an offence to drive more than a short way off a highway on to a common without lawful authority. However, in a local byelaw, there is a condition under which that ban must not apply. It clearly states that the ban is not intended to stop

"the use by any vehicle on any road on the Common for the purpose of travelling to or from any property to which the Common affords the sole means of vehicular access".

Mr. Farrow seeks to exploit a loophole in the law, by virtue of the fact that

"a by-law cannot be made or legally interpreted in such a way as to overrule a public statute".

That is an obvious example of the contradictions that occur in the confusing field of law, but I am surprised that such a blatant statement allowing vehicles to be driven over commons to reach properties can apparently be bypassed and ignored.

As I speak, there is still no confirmed landowner and the evidence is conflicting. The residents who use, and always have used, the common to reach their homes bought their houses having fully researched the position. Now, it is as if another £25,000 were being added retrospectively to the price.

Mr. Farrow, who invested £4,200, sold the title of "Lord of the Manor of Newtown" for £12,000. I have no quarrel with that. If someone wants to be Lord of the Manor of Newtown, that is fine with me and no harm is done to anyone else. However, Mr. Farrow now wants about £500,000 from my constituents. When I took up their case, as any other hon. Member would have done, he wrote to me:

"Depending on the circumstances and how much loss the company suffers because those who were going to contract with the company did not do so as a result of your statements, they could give rise to a legal action against you".

I can look after myself, but not all my constituents can. I cannot understand anyone going to the lengths that I have described to enrich themselves at the expense of my constituents.

I turn to the role of the Government. These are my questions to the Minister. First, as a Member of Parliament, if not as a Minister, can he understand the anger and fear of those of my constituents who find themselves in the predicament that I have outlined?

Secondly, does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in this day and age, people should not be held to ransom in that way, when they have done all the searches and used all the right professionals?

Thirdly, where has the Land Registry got to in processing the application?

Fourthly, if the Land Registry has no option, does the Minister agree that the law should be changed, so that residents in Newtown will not be disadvantaged if they do not succumb to Mr. Farrow's demands, but will continue to enjoy the rights that everyone thought they enjoyed?

Fifthly, what legislative changes would be necessary? The 1955 royal commission on commons recommended the establishment of statutory registers for all common land, including a record of the rights exercisable over it and its ownership. It was proposed that there should be new statutory management schemes for, and a universal right of public access to, common land. In the event, it was decided to implement the recommendations in two stages, the first being the enactment of the Commons Registration Act 1965, with its scheme of statutory registers. The second stage, dealing with statutory management schemes and the principle of a universal right of public access to common land, was never implemented. It is widely recognised that the 1965 Act was not entirely adequate to give effect to its original purposes. It has been frequently criticised by the judiciary.

It is, therefore, clear that fresh legislation is necessary to deal with not only the matters originally envisaged, but deficiencies, anomalies and injustices that have been highlighted since the 1965 Act came into force—not just those in Newtown Common, but those in other parts of the country, including Surrey Heath; I see my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) in his place. The legislation should provide that when there has been no charge or restriction by the owner of a common for vehicular access across a common, and when—in the 60 years from 1925 to 1985, or for a period of at least 20 years, or since the house was built—the access has formed the vehicular access to a private house, there is presumed to be a grant of vehicular access from the owner of the common to the owner of a private house accessed across it. It should provide also that neither the owner of the common nor his successors in title may in future charge for vehicular or other access or put restrictions on the access across the common.

I hope that I have carried the Minister with me so far, and that, if I have, the Government will either introduce the changes themselves, by amending a suitable

[Sir George Young]

Government Bill—perhaps the right to roam legislation, if it is introduced—or give a smooth passage to a suitable private Member's Bill seeking the same objective.

I believe that I have outlined a real injustice, which I ask the Minister to put right.

1.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Chris Mullin): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) for raising this issue and giving me the opportunity to present the Government's response, and also for his kind opening remarks.

The situation that the right hon. Gentleman has described seems, on the face of it, to be outrageous, and I can well understand the feeling of injustice that his constituents feel. Were our roles reversed, I might well have made a similar speech.

Today, I received a letter from Mr. Farrow of Bakewell Management, saying that the proposed charges will be lower than those that have been reported, although he does not go any further than that. He also points out that other organisations such as Surrey county council and the National Trust charge for access across common land. I should add to that that the Government have advised local councils that they have a duty to their tax payers to charge reasonable charges for access across common land. The emphasis, of course, is on the word "reasonable".

Mr. Farrow also said that Bakewell Management proposes eventually to form a trust and to endow it with a lump sum, and that the trust will be controlled by local people. I am sure that the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire notes that with interest.

Sir George Young: It is a gift of dubious benefit. Bakewell proposes stripping out the common's asset value and—so that Bakewell is not encumbered with any obligations of maintaining the common—parking it in a trust. One has to consider the offer with some caution.

Mr. Mullin: I share the right hon. Gentleman's view on that point. I should also say that, although Bakewell may well have the letter of the law on its side, I wonder whether it is able to defend its position morally, as well as legally.

The matter stems from an application for first registration of Newtown common that has been made by a company called Bakewell Management Ltd. It is essentially a matter of private ownership of land, and the applicant is therefore entitled to keep certain aspects of its application private. It would be inappropriate for me to discuss the details of the particular case

As the right hon. Gentleman will know, all applications for registration of land are dealt with by the Land Registry, the main statutory function of which is to keep a register of title to freehold and leasehold land throughout England and Wales. The head of the Land Registry is the chief land registrar, who is appointed by the Lord Chancellor under the Land Registration Act 1925—which gives the chief land registrar responsibility for conducting the whole business of registration. As the right hon. Gentleman will understand, it is not a matter in which a Minister could intervene.

There are, however, some general issues that apply to every application for first registration. The procedures to be followed are set out in the Land Registration Act 1925 and the land registration rules 1925. Whenever an applicant shows that he is the owner of a property, the chief land registrar is bound to register that property showing the applicant as the owner—he does not have a discretion.

The most recent application for first registration in this case was lodged in July 1997. In March and April 1999, advertisements were placed in the *Newbury Weekly News* and the *Basingstoke Gazette* giving brief details of the application and allowing 14 days for any objections to be lodged. The advertisements provoked a number of objections, the majority about rights of way over the common. As the right hon. Gentleman said, the current position on the application is that it is still with the Land Registry for determination.

A specific criticism has been made about the time limits imposed by the Land Registry for lodging objections or evidence in support. Generally, a reasonable but fairly short time will be allowed initially for people to lodge objections. The Land Registry recognises that most objectors will not have all their evidence immediately to hand and may well also wish to seek legal advice. If so, the Land Registry will generally be sympathetic if it is asked for more time, and legitimate objections will be accepted for consideration at any stage of the application.

Many of the residents seem to be frustrated that they are not allowed to object solely on the grounds that they genuinely believe that the applicant does not own the common. They can make a formal challenge to the application only if they can show that they have a competing claim. That does not mean that the Land Registry will ignore any relevant information that may have been provided to it by a third party. The Land Registry may well choose to take up such information with the applicant, but it will be a matter solely between the Land Registry and the applicant.

I hope that that satisfactorily deals with the registration issues.

As I am sure the right hon. Gentleman has discovered in his investigations, the title "common land" is something of a misnomer. The term "common" refers to rights held in common by certain people to use the products of the soil of the common—for example, for grazing or cutting turf. Common land is, therefore, not land that is available to everyone, but generally owned by someone, and that person enjoys rights of ownership, although those rights may not be precisely the same as those enjoyed over land that is not common. The majority of common land is in private ownership.

As the right hon. Gentleman has discovered, it has been an offence—under either the Law of Property Act 1925 and/or subsequent Road Traffic Acts—to drive over common land without the owner's permission. He also mentioned a local byelaw that seemed to suggest that a ban should not apply on Newtown common. I sympathise with his view that that is an apparent contradiction in a confusing sphere of law. However, I am sure that he will appreciate that, in all spheres of law, it would be far more confusing if primary legislation could be overridden by a local byelaw.

The right hon. Gentleman suggested that something should be done to rectify what he suggests is antiquated law—particularly by a Government whom he knows to be

committed to modernisation. I agree that, in some ways, common land law is ripe for review, and I shall return to that in a moment. However, the issue in this case is not primarily about common land law at all, but more about landowners' rights generally. Specifically, the issue is whether it is appropriate and lawful for landowners to have the ability to make an unlimited charge for activities that take place on land of which they are recognised as the legal owner. In that respect, common land is essentially no different from other land.

According to the law, landowners have the ability to charge for the right of vehicular access over their land, and that ability has been tested in the courts in cases very similar to the current one. Although I fully appreciate why the residents of Newtown common, and other people, consider it unacceptable that someone should be able to acquire land and then make significant changes to their use of it unless a large fee is paid, one of the purposes of the legislation was, and continues to be, to protect land from the intrusive use of vehicles.

In certain, limited circumstances, prescriptive rights may be acquired through long use. For example, generally, it is possible to obtain a right of way by 20 years' use, so long as the use is neither by force, nor secretly, nor with permission. However, the courts have ruled that it is not possible to obtain a right of way by long use when the use is a criminal offence. From the information available, it seems unlikely that the residents of Newtown common have any such prescriptive rights because, as I have already mentioned, the provisions of the 1925 Act and subsequent Road Traffic Acts have made it an offence to drive across common land. Undoubtedly, however, the residents have sought specific legal advice on their rights.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the possibility of legislative changes. He has mentioned the proposed right to roam legislation. That is a nice try, but I am afraid that it does not apply in these circumstances, as our proposals for access to open countryside, including registered common land, are about access on foot only. However, we shall soon be considering whether there should be any changes in the legislation that affects common land. If so, there will be public consultation on what changes would be desirable. I cannot promise that the Government will feel it necessary to act on vehicular access over common land, because, as I have said, there are wider issues to consider. Extinguishing landowners' rights without compensation would no doubt have implications under the Human Rights Act 1998. However, there may well be a case for placing some reasonable limit on the charge that the owner is entitled to make. I must again emphasise that I can make no commitment to legislation. I should also point out that, to be of any assistance to the residents of Newtown common, such legislation might have to include a retrospective element. The right hon. Gentleman has served in government for much longer than I have, so he will know that all Governments are reluctant to make legislation applicable retrospectively.

I am sorry that I cannot offer the right hon. Gentleman and his constituents the reassurance that they seek. I understand their anxiety and the uncertainty that the unresolved situation creates for the residents, particularly for those who lack the resources to meet the possible access charges. The situation causes me some disquiet, and I have looked carefully to see what comfort I can offer.

I shall watch with interest the level of charges that Bakewell imposes and compare them with the reasonable charges for similar access made by county councils and the National Trust. I hope that whatever charges are imposed can be defended morally as well as legally.

Sir George Young: I know that the Minister is being as helpful as he can. Having made inquiries on what county councils charge, what does he regard as a reasonable charge? Would legislation to deal with the issue necessarily be retrospective? If the residents of Newtown common decide not to pay the 6 per cent.—or whatever the fee is—but to sit tight, and if legislation is introduced in due course that gives people rights on common land, there will be no need for the retrospective element that the Minister deplores.

Mr. Mullin: I cannot say off the top of my head what I regard as a reasonable charge. There are other examples. We have referred to a couple of them. The right hon. Gentleman can look at them and see for himself what is considered elsewhere to be a reasonable charge. I shall consider his points about getting round the retrospection, but I cannot give any commitment today.

As matters stand, I regret that I cannot see a way in which the Government could assist the right hon. Gentleman's constituents, but I am willing to meet him to discuss the matter further if he thinks that that would be useful.

Sir George Young: The Minister said that the behaviour of Bakewell, although legal, was difficult to defend morally. If a private Member's Bill got round the problem, would he be minded to support it?

Mr. Mullin: The right hon. Gentleman has occupied various posts in the Department that I now have the honour to represent. Because he is so much more experienced than I am, he will realise that he is pushing his luck by asking me to say on the spot that I shall support such legislation. The Government are clear on that. We cannot give a commitment on legislation. However, I assure him that we shall look carefully at any sensible proposals that anyone, particularly the right hon. Gentleman, comes up with.

It being before Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

NEW WRIT

For the borough constituency of Kensington and Chelsea, in the room of the right hon. Alan Kenneth McKenzie Clark, deceased.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Challenge Fund

1. **Mr. Tony Worthington** (Clydebank and Milngavie): What assessment she has made of the likely impact of the new challenge fund on the activities of development organisations concerned with supporting her reproductive health policy. [95580]

7. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): For what reason funding for family planning and reproductive health in the civil society challenge fund has been reduced to 50 per cent. matched funding. [95586]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Our new civil society challenge fund is designed to engage a wide range of organisations in the UK in the development of a strong civil society, speaking up for the poor in developing countries. This replaces the old joint funding scheme which predominately financed service delivery by development non-governmental organisations. Our health programme is a more effective instrument for building countrywide access to reproductive health care and NGOs are frequently involved in this work. To help reproductive health care organisations adjust to the new arrangements, I have decided to phase in this change by offering 85 per cent. funding for year 1 of the new fund and 70 per cent. for year 2, reaching 50 per cent. in year 3.

Mr. Worthington: I welcome the decision by my right hon. Friend to phase in the changes. She will be well aware that organisations such as Marie Stopes International and Population Concern received 100 per cent. funding because of the sheer difficulty of raising funds for matters such as the sexual education of the young. Will my right hon. Friend keep an eye on this matter—I know of her commitment to it—so that we ensure that we meet our Cairo targets and that the work increases in the coming years?

Clare Short: The Department tried to find out why those NGOs were given 100 per cent. funding, unlike everyone else. To be honest, we could not get to the root of it, although what my hon. Friend has mentioned is alleged to be the reason. I am pleased to phase in the change, but my hon. Friend may like to know that we have doubled our commitment to £80 million, and that lots of NGOs are involved. The old joint funding scheme was worth £3 million. This is not the only route to giving people access to control over their fertility, and NGOs are involved in the much larger-scale work that we do.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the NGOs involved in reproductive and sexual health are regarded as among the best in the world? There is a fear among them that, if the matched funding is reduced from 100 to 85 per cent. in year 1, and then to 75 and 50 per cent., our Cairo targets may not be met. Will the Secretary of State keep the matter under review and, if that proves to be the case, alter the targets?

Clare Short: I shall gently repeat the figures that I have just put to the House. As a Government, we are committed to meeting the Cairo targets so that every person and family in the world can control their fertility and raise healthy children. NGOs cannot provide that service all over the world, but they can help us to help Governments to provide a universal service for their people. Those are our objectives. We have increased spending through our mainstream health programmes to £80 million a year, whereas the old funding scheme provided £3 million a year. We want NGOs to be involved, but we want universal services—not just a patchy provision.

Ms Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): I commend my right hon. Friend for her recognition that access to sexual and reproductive health services plays such an important part in the promotion of sustainable development and the elimination of poverty. Does she agree that, if all donor countries met their United Nations targets, 150 million people who want access to family planning would have it? The United Kingdom Government are paying more than their dues in this respect, and I commend her for that.

I, too, thank my right hon. Friend for recognising the difficulty that UK NGOs working on sexual and reproductive health have in raising funds. Will she do what she can to encourage British companies and foundations to support and make a fuller contribution to those NGOs, which do such a good job in raising awareness of the issues and providing services to people both here and in developing countries?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We are committed to a human rights-based approach to development. All human beings, without exception, should have the chance to control their fertility, to have healthy children, to have those children educated and to see their families become better off. This work is part of giving people that freedom and improvement in their quality of life. I promise that we will continue to work with NGOs that are committed to those objectives.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Further to what the Secretary of State has just told the House, can she confirm that her Department funds no birth control policies abroad that would be unacceptable in the United Kingdom?

Clare Short: I can absolutely confirm that. The Cairo principles represented a great breakthrough after all the argument in the international system about population control by compulsion and the bad example that was set in the past in India and China. The great achievement of Cairo was to establish that there should be freedom of choice with no compulsion or pressure on people. We work absolutely according to those principles. There is much misreporting of our around £17 million a year support to the United Nations Population Fund, which is working in China to get away from compulsion and towards freedom of choice. We strongly support that.

Debt Relief

2. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What progress has been made in securing international agreement on debt relief for poorer countries. [95581]

4. **Mr. Ivan Lewis** (Bury, South): If she will make a statement on debt relief following the World bank-International Monetary Fund annual meetings in Washington. [95583]

6. **Mr. Alan W. Williams** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): If she will make a statement on progress made by the World bank and the International Monetary Fund on relieving third world debt. [95585]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Agreement on a substantial revision to the heavily indebted poor countries initiative was reached at the annual meetings of the World bank and the IMF at the end of September. The new framework will deliver deeper debt relief and provide it more quickly and to more countries. The debt relief will be strongly focused on supporting poverty reduction strategies. A comprehensive financial package is still being worked out.

I made an additional pledge in Washington of $50 million towards the costs, helping to leverage further pledges from other countries and bringing the UK's total commitment to $221 million, or approximately £135 million. We are pressing the European Commission to firm up its proposals to a contribution of at least 1 billion euro. If that is agreed, the UK contribution to the trust fund will rise to $400 million.

Mr. Blizzard: I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said and congratulate her on her work in achieving that historic agreement, which shows that the Government are leading the world. Does she agree that, alongside the debt reduction initiative, in the new World Trade Organisation round starting in Seattle this month, it will be important for the agenda to include international development targets so that poorer countries benefit from world trade agreements? Will she ensure that the Government's negotiating position includes that commitment?

Clare Short: At the World bank annual meeting, we made a commitment to supporting developing countries in advancing their trading rights and therefore their economic position in the next trade round. The Government have made a strong commitment to work for a trade round that brings real benefits to developing countries. It is both morally right and will give us a more stable global economy if the poorest countries can speed up their economic growth and the reduction of poverty.

Mr. Lewis: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the agreement that she and others have brokered is something of which Labour Members can be incredibly proud? It differentiates us from the Conservative party, which was unable to broker such agreements in government. It demonstrates how, if Britain is once again respected in the world, it can make a real difference in working for both humanitarian and economic objectives, whether in the European Community or on the wider international stage.

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. To be fair to the Conservatives, some of their representatives called for debt relief and gave a lead on some of the arguments, but they never put any money on the table and, therefore, had much less leverage with other countries than we have had since we came into government. We have worked since for faster debt relief and made available a bigger financial contribution. I am most proud that we have got debt relief linked to systematic poverty reduction strategies and got the IMF and the World bank to work in a way that is unprecedented and will have consequences beyond debt relief.

Mr. Williams: I congratulate my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Chancellor and the Jubilee 2000 campaign on their excellent work over the past few years and especially this summer. Will the money come from the Department for International Development budget or from the Treasury, and what are the annual recurrent costs? I am delighted that the agreements have been reached, but how will we pay for them?

Clare Short: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point, because the funding package that we need to implement Cologne is not firmly in place. We must firm up the EU pledge, and the pledge made by the United States of America has not yet been supported by Congress. The US Administration are working hard to get that support, but, if they fail, the HIPC trust fund will be in difficulty. The funding comes partly from the IMF, partly from the World bank and partly from export credit departments, but we need a trust fund to make up the difference that cannot come from those pockets. Our contributions to that trust fund come mostly from my Department's budget, although the Treasury and my Department will share the cost of the additional commitments made in Washington. Debt relief must help the poor, because otherwise it would mean that aid money was taken away from equally poor countries without large debts—and that would not be fair.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Secretary of State will know that the Opposition support much of the progress made in the past 12 months on debt relief, building on the success of the Conservative years. Given that US Treasury officials have now confirmed that President Clinton's initiative of 100 per cent. bilateral debt write-off for the world's poorest countries will include debts that arose after the cut-off date in each case, will the Secretary of State clarify whether the Government's write-off will also include post-cut-off-date debt—yes or no?

Clare Short: Let me explain to the hon. Gentleman that President Clinton—who is the master of spin—has not yet been able to persuade Congress fully to fund the USA's commitment. He said that his Government will consider going beyond the 90 per cent. debt write-off—at least for all export credit debt, which is part of the new package—to 100 per cent., case by case, if the countries involved are focused on poverty reduction. We hope that

he will get the funding from Congress to deliver that pledge. Going beyond 90 per cent. is not a matter for my Department, and I wish to make it clear that it would be wrong to use our aid budget to pay off export credit debt. That is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The Chancellor has made it clear that, in individual cases, we will consider going as far as 100 per cent. The hon. Gentleman should put his questions to my right hon. Friend, because I am keen to protect my budget from that argument.

Mr. Streeter: I am sorry, but that simply will not do. The Secretary of State is keen to take the credit for some of the breakthroughs, but she is not prepared to take the responsibility. If the US Government matches the 100 per cent. write-off that President Clinton has spoken about, will the Government match it—yes or no? The Secretary of State has already answered that question because she has written to every Labour Member, saying that the Government will match President Clinton's offer. She even included a model press release for Members to send to her constituents setting out the good news even further. Labour's internal document claims that Labour leads on debt relief and that the Government have agreed to a write-off of 100 per cent. of UK loans. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government will match President Clinton's offer? If they will not, is not that another case of Labour saying one thing and doing another?

Clare Short: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman shows that his grasp of the issues is about the same as that of Miss Ann Pettifor. Given her political background, one might say that the two make strange bed fellows.

The question is interesting, but it is not the most important. The most important achievement made at Cologne, and then in Washington, is that debt relief is now faster and deeper, and is focused on a leveraging policy that systematically reduces poverty. The issue raised by the hon. Gentleman is something of a side show, given that the funding and agreement to implement what was agreed at Cologne have not yet been secured. President Clinton has not yet got the funding to meet his contribution to the HIPC trust fund. We hope that he will get that additional money.

As I said earlier, the hon. Gentleman should take the matter up with my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. However, I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman does not understand that the most important consideration for the poor is to implement the package that we have got.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I welcome the initiatives that the Government have taken, which follow on from those taken by the previous Conservative Government. However, does the Secretary of State agree that one of the problems is that the programme has moved too slowly? So far, only four of the 36 qualifying countries have received debt reductions. That is the result of what many people consider to be unrealistically stringent economic conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World bank. Is the right hon. Lady satisfied that those rigid conditions are being relaxed in the latest initiatives?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The previous initiative required a six-year track record, but that is an awful long time for qualifying countries. The initiative has gone much too slowly because it is not generous enough. It was meant to give a sustainable exit from the burden of debt but, when coffee prices worldwide fell, Uganda and Bolivia—which had qualified for debt reduction—found that they had not escaped that burden. Our aim is to achieve conditions that will be more generous and flexible, so that countries can qualify for relief earlier. By that means, we will be able to leverage good economic policy to promote the growth that reduces poverty.

That is what has been agreed in the new package, and what is so good about it. We must now assemble the funding to get it implemented very rapidly.

East Timor

3. **Mr. Derek Twigg** (Halton): What steps her Department is taking in East Timor to provide humanitarian assistance and to assist with reconstruction. [95582]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): I am pleased to tell the House that we have doubled our contribution to the response to the crisis in East Timor to £6.5 million. That is made up of £5.5 million for immediate assistance, and £1 million to support the transition to independence.

So far, our funding has been used to re-establish the UN presence by providing communication and transport systems. It has also been used to help fund the safe return of refugees and to provide funding for the World Food Programme to help it supply food and shelter. We are also working to ensure power and safe water supplies are restored.

We have also provided funding to the Gurkhas to enable them to run mobile clinics, escort humanitarian convoys, distribute food and help with the clean-up operations.

Mr. Twigg: I thank my hon. Friend for securing the much-needed extra resources, as many of my constituents have written to me about this matter, which is also of grave concern to many Church groups. Will my hon. Friend do all in his power to ensure that the assistance gets to the right people quickly?

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is right. One of the biggest problems is access to the refugees. There are about 230,000 refugees in West Timor, and only about 22,000 have been allowed to return to East Timor. I urge the Government of Indonesia to allow us safe access to the refugees and to do everything that they can to ensure the safe passage of refugees back to their homes.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Will the Minister take urgent steps to promote the interests of British companies in achieving the physical reconstruction of East Timor that he has described? If he answers that question in the affirmative, how will he explain the different answer to the same question given by the Secretary of State in China last December? At that time, she specifically excluded promoting British companies in China.

Mr. Foulkes: Our main aim is to ensure that the reconstruction is carried out as quickly and effectively as possible. If that can be done by British companies, then so much the better.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I am pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister mention the refugees in West Timor. I understand that 219,000 of them are still there; after three weeks' of trying, the UNHCR has managed to repatriate 16,000 people. That is clearly inadequate: does my hon. Friend agree that more pressure to release those refugees back to their homeland must be exerted on the Indonesian Government?

Will my hon. Friend also ensure that the investigation of war crimes in East Timor continues apace? As yet, forensic scientists have not even entered the country to begin what should be the urgent and immediate investigation of the thousands of killings during the Indonesian occupation.

Mr. Foulkes: I agree with my hon. Friend on both counts. We are doing all that we can to ensure that refugees return. We estimate that about 22,000 have returned, but that is only about 10 per cent. of the total. We are urging the Government of Indonesia to do everything that they can to get refugees home as quickly as possible. On the question of human rights violations, Britain fully supports international efforts to ensure that those guilty of abuses are brought to justice. We were one of the co-sponsors of the European Union resolution adopted on 27 September at the special session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which called for an international commission of inquiry to establish the facts.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Minister agree that the expense being placed on the Department for International Development by the reconstruction of East Timor would have been saved if the Government had listened to the clamour of that country's supporters and stopped the sale of arms to Indonesia much earlier? Will he assure the House that his Department will in future have more influence on where the United Kingdom sells its arms?

Mr. Foulkes: That matter is under active discussion. As far as the money is concerned, half the sum involved is being found by reallocating resources set aside for Indonesia to East Timor, a policy with which I am sure the hon. Lady would agree. The other half will come from the reserve.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We welcome the positive contribution of the Department for International Development to Indonesia, but can the Minister assure us that he will not take his eye off the ball, given that human atrocities occur in other parts of Indonesia, such as Ambon? Will he keep up the pressure on the Indonesian authorities?

Mr. Foulkes: I can certainly give that assurance. That is exactly the kind of thing that our funding to Indonesia is geared towards.

Banana Producers (Commonwealth)

5. **Mr. Tony Baldry** (Banbury): What assistance Her Majesty's Government are giving to Commonwealth banana-producing countries to assist diversification. [95584]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): Through the EU, we are providing substantial funds to promote diversification and alternative income opportunities in Caribbean banana-producing countries. We are also supplying technical help to those programmes and support through our own programmes to help reduce vulnerability by developing educational skills and encouraging diversification. I might add that, in 1998, under the Commonwealth debt initiative, Jamaica, St Lucia, Dominica and Grenada all had bilateral debt cancelled.

Mr. Baldry: I am sure that the Minister will appreciate that most Members feel that the Commonwealth should have first charge on the UK aid budget, particularly the bilateral aid budget. Fairly or not, a lot of Commonwealth Caribbean countries say that they feel neglected. Only the other day, Prime Minister Jospin of France was in Guadaloupe to promote the interests of Francophone banana producers. Is it not time that the Government gave greater urgency to assistance for the Commonwealth Caribbean countries, not only through the EU aid budget, but through our bilateral aid budget?

Mr. Foulkes: I assure the hon. Gentleman—and the chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram)—that there is no diminution in our concern for the Caribbean banana producers and the other Commonwealth countries. The position is quite the reverse. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has visited the Caribbean, and we have set up a Caribbean forum to discuss the problems of the region. I have visited the Caribbean on a number of occasions—*[Interruption.]* I shall be very happy to go again, and shall, indeed, do so when I go to Jamaica next month.

Trade Capacity Building

8. **Mr. Phil Hope** (Corby): What measures her Department is taking *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* through multilateral organisations to support trade capacity building in the poorest countries. [95587]

9. **Mrs. Sylvia Heal** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis): If she will make a statement on the actions her Department is taking to support trade capacity building in developing countries. [95588]

10. **Mr. Tony Colman** (Putney): If she will make a statement on the World Trade Organisation Seattle development round negotiations. [95589]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We are working both bilaterally and with a wide range of international organisations to help build the capacity of developing countries to participate effectively in the international trading system. A full list of the work that we are supporting has been placed in the Library of the House.

It is not widely appreciated that three quarters of the members of the World Trade Organisation are developing countries. That means that they are in a position to make great gains and improve their development prospects in the next trade round. It also means that agreement in the next round is dependent on their support. We have, over the past two years, provided £10 million to support training on the negotiating capacity of developing countries and their ability to make use of trade opportunities. We are also working to encourage the EU, the World bank and other agencies to provide further support.

Mr. Hope: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. I recently visited Vietnam and saw at first hand—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. I cannot hear what hon. Members are saying; it is very disruptive.

Mr. Hope: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I recently visited Vietnam and saw at first hand the excellent poverty reduction work that is funded by DFID. Vietnam has applied to join the World Trade Organisation, but is not yet a member. Many developing countries that are members of the WTO are not getting a fair deal from that organisation. Will the Secretary of State take action to ensure that countries such as Vietnam and other WTO member states get a fair deal and are better able to participate in the system for resolving world trade disputes?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am absolutely convinced that a membership-based, rules-based organisation—which is what the WTO now is—gives developing countries the chance to secure better rights in the international trading system. However, we are concerned that some countries are reluctant to use the rules to exercise their rights because they fear the costs involved. Therefore, we have joined other countries in establishing a legal advisory centre, which will be launched in Seattle. It will make it easier for developing countries to exercise their rights under the rules-based system.

Mrs. Heal: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Heal: In thanking my right hon. Friend for her answer, I draw her attention to the disappointment felt by many developing countries at the outcome of the Uruguay round. What realistic expectations can they have for the new round?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is alleged that developing countries did not make gains from the Uruguay round. However, the World bank and others conducted a thorough study which found that developing countries' gains were at least as good as—and, in proportion to income, better than—those of the industrialised countries. That is not to say that the developing countries cannot make greater gains, but it is not true that they did not benefit from the last round. It is important that everyone understands that developing countries can gain more from a comprehensive round, which is the position that we should support.

Mr. Colman: Given the failure of negotiations on the multilateral agreement on investment at the OECD, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be sensible to restart investment negotiations at the World Trade Organisation, with proper safeguards for core labour standards, environmental protection and good governance? If she agrees, will she take that agenda to UNCTAD 10 in Thailand in February in order to ensure consensus among the United Nations community?

Clare Short: I agree that the poorest developing countries need massive inward investment that will provide infrastructure and access to modern technology and knowledge. The World Trade Organisation is the right place to negotiate an international investment agreement that will bring benefits to developing countries. The EU believes that such an agreement should be included in the next round, and we support both securing agreement in Seattle and assisting developing countries in fighting their corner.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is it not the case that the illegal distortions to world trade that are inherent in the protectionist regime of the European Union—particularly with regard to bananas, to which the Minister referred earlier—are causing severe impoverishment in third world countries? Is the World Trade Organisation not entitled to ask the European Union to put its own house in order? For example, there has been severe disruption on the streets of Ecuador, a third world banana producer, which is so severely in debt that it has been forced to renege on its obligations.

Clare Short: I assure the hon. Gentleman that talks on bananas are continuing and we are hopeful that we will secure an agreement that will be WTO compatible and will guard the interests of the banana-producing Caribbean countries, in particular. I hope that we are on the brink of settling that long-running, unhelpful dispute.

I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman that the European Union's highly protective, highly subsidised agriculture is not good for consumers in Europe and is a barrier to trading opportunities for developing countries that have their natural advantage in agriculture production. We strongly support the consideration of agriculture as a major issue in the next trade round, and we hope to dismantle some of that protectionism.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [95610] **Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 3 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Sanders: The Prime Minister will be aware that his Government, unlike the previous Government, have recognised some of the problems facing seaside resort economies. Money has been available through the single regeneration budget, although it is not enough, and councils have to bid for it and not all of them get it. Recent statements by the Government suggest that objective 2 is being used to help seaside resort economies, but closer analysis reveals that the wards that have designated objective 2 status do so because of deprivation, not because they are seaside resorts. What extra help will the Government give to seaside resort economies around the country that are facing desperate problems?

The Prime Minister: The Government recognise the special needs of seaside resorts by making allowances for seasonal changes in employment and heavier social services costs in our support to such areas through the local authorities financial settlement. In addition, since July, the hon. Gentleman's constituency has been awarded almost £3 million under the single regeneration budget. Torbay has now been designated a new enterprise grant area, with grants available for small and medium companies, many of which are involved in tourism. Torbay has also been included in our proposals for objective 2 structural funds.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The day after the Prime Minister was at the CBI conference and share option tax breaks were being thrown around like confetti, he probably heard on the radio and saw on television that the last pit in the north-east had closed, so two very significant industrial matters arose in one week. As Richard Budge is investing money in coal mines in Australia, Venezuela and other countries, can he really be trusted to save the last 13 deep mines, which still produce the cheapest coal in Europe? There is only one solution, which is not to fill the pockets of Mr. Richard Budge and his gang, but to think the unthinkable and take those 13 coal mines back into public ownership.

The Prime Minister: I do not think that I can do that, but I can say that, as a result of the changes that we made on coming into office, we have given time for the whole energy policy to be sorted out and, in particular, for the discrimination against coal to be ended. That gives tremendous help to the coal mines and coal-mining areas. If we had continued the policy of the previous Government, every single pit in Britain would have been closed by now, but this Government will not do that; this Government will carry on sorting out an energy policy that is in the interests of all the country.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): When it is so important to encourage small information technology companies to thrive in this country, what on earth are the Government doing voting tonight for yet another of the Prime Minister's stealth taxes which will hit precisely those companies? Will not another £500 million of taxes drive such companies to set up business abroad rather than here in Britain?

The Prime Minister: No, because as a result of the changes that we are making to the taxes on small businesses, including lowering corporation tax and the small business tax, we are giving the best boost to small businesses that this country has seen for many years, which is why so many of them are thriving.

Mr. Hague: We are talking about the knowledge economy, and judging by the Prime Minister's answer, he is not part of it. The Government will vote tonight for another £500 million stealth tax that affects thousands of small businesses, particularly information technology businesses, and other contractors. That measure is called IR 35, but it is really a stealth tax.

As the chairman of the Professional Contractors Group says,

"the proposals show astonishing naivety."

Their effect

"will be to kill the enterprise culture. American multinationals will be laughing all the way to the bank as the British Government destroys their home grown competition."

It is not too late to avert this, so will the Prime Minister look at it again, and vote with us tonight to strike it out of the legislation?

The Prime Minister: I certainly will not do that. We are quite right to introduce this measure. Companies will be treated on a fair basis—the same basis on which everyone pays taxes in this country. If we did as the right hon. Gentleman says, we would lose hundreds of millions of pounds of revenue. That is in addition to the £7 billion of revenue that we would lose if we accepted all the Opposition's amendments. Perhaps, when he gets up and attacks me again, he will explain how he will fund those commitments.

Mr. Hague: The Government have not yet brought in the measure, so they would not lose any revenue at all; and when the Government are driving thousands of IT businesses out of this country, there is no point in posing with a computer every other week trying to be computer-friendly—presumably looking for the on switch.

The British Chambers of Commerce has calculated from the Government's own figures that business taxes will rise by £30 billion in this Parliament as a result of the Chancellor's Budget, so will the Prime Minister acknowledge that what he told the House in February when he said

"business tax has come down"—[*Official Report*, 10 February 1999; Vol. 325, c. 316.]

is, yet again, the opposite of the truth? Will he acknowledge now that business taxes are going up?

The Prime Minister: They are not. We are cutting corporation tax, as we have said many times. In answer to the right hon. Gentleman's central point, the measure will ensure that everyone in the country pays tax on the same basis, so people do not avoid tax, which others then have to pay.

The measure will not drive companies out of Britain. Countries such as ours are thriving because, for the first time in years, we have managed to bring public spending and inflation under proper control, which is why the economy—far from being in recession, as the right hon. Gentleman said a few months ago—is thriving.

The right hon. Gentleman says that we have not yet lost money. If we did not take these measures, and if we went down his path and included that £7 billion of tax cuts, we would have to find that money from somewhere in the years ahead. As he says that he wants to run an effective economic policy, it is about time that he answered the questions that we had to answer when we were in opposition. Where does the money come from for that £7 billion of tax cuts?

Mr. Hague: The more the right hon. Gentleman refuses to admit the truth, the less people believe what he says. He talked about reducing corporation tax, but, yesterday, at the CBI conference, he actually said that he had heard complaints about corporation tax. People do not come and complain that he has cut the rate; they come and complain because they have to pay. On Monday, the president of the CBI said that when the Government talk about changes in business tax, any cuts are

"more than offset by the windfall tax, the loss of the Dividend Tax Credit and now the Climate Change Levy. The sums they give back are trivial by comparison."

Will the Prime Minister now answer the question and agree that, although he said that business taxes were coming down, the opposite is the case, and they have actually gone up?

The Prime Minister: I will not, for the reason that I gave on corporation tax. If I may bring the right hon. Gentleman back to the central point, what business needs more than anything is economic stability. That stability depends on our running a budget and ensuring that the finances are under proper control, so that we can get inflation under control and provide the stability that business needs. That is precisely why we have some of the best economic circumstances that the country has seen for years.

If we went down the alternative path of the Opposition's amendments to the Finance Bill, it would mean £7 billion of lost revenue. However, the Opposition have also tabled amendments to the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill totalling an extra £4 billion social security spending. That makes £11 billion—*[Interruption.]* I am afraid that Conservative Members should understand what their own Front Benchers are doing before they shout at me. The amendments would mean that this country would lose £11 billion a year.

All Governments have to take difficult decisions. We have taken them and sorted out public finances. The right hon. Gentleman cannot tell us where the £7 billion will come from, but will he at least tell us what he will do about the £4 billion-worth of extra social security spending?

Mr. Hague: The question is whether business taxes have gone up. The Prime Minister is as stealthy with the truth as he is with his taxes. He claims that taxes are going down when they are going up; he says that he is worried about red tape when he is introducing it by the yard; he talks about the importance of information technology, but will tonight vote to drive many such companies abroad; he speaks about competition but is diminishing Britain's competitive advantage. Along with his promise to increase no taxes at all, is not all that part of the great Labour lie?

The Prime Minister: The Government are investing more in new technology than any previous Government. Indeed, we are putting several hundred million pounds into technology centres around the country to give people access to the new skills. As a result of measures announced by the Chancellor, we have probably provided a better system of help to start up technology companies than this country has ever seen—and that is acknowledged by many people.

In the end, the choice is between the economic priorities and economic competence of both parties. We inherited a £28 billion borrowing requirement and a national debt which had doubled, but we have sorted out the public finances and, for the first time in many, many years, given the country the prospect of steady growth. The right hon. Gentleman has totally failed to say how he manages, at one and the same time, to tell people that he will cut their taxes by billions of billions of pounds, but increase social security spending by billions of pounds, while still wanting more money to be spent on defence, law and order, schools and hospitals.

In opposition, we had to answer those questions, and at some point the right hon. Gentleman will have to answer them, too. Then, the country will see that it has a clear choice between a Labour Government who are running a competent economy and a Conservative party that not merely cannot add up its sums, but has not the faintest clue of how to deal with the tough decisions affecting the British economy.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): If it is true, as is often said, that my right hon. Friend pays attention to the views of the readership of the *Daily Mail*, will he allay the concerns of this reader and of my very many right hon. and hon. Friends that the headline on its front page today about a retreat on the ban on hunting is simply wrong?

The Prime Minister: I assure my hon. Friend that the Home Secretary will make an announcement in the next few days, although I can tell her that she should not believe all that she reads in the newspapers.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): We know that the Government have offered some concessions on the detail, but not the principle, of means testing incapacity benefits. Although that might be enough to buy off some rebels on his Back Benches, will the Prime Minister acknowledge that such a policy will still

end up penalising some of the most vulnerable people in our society? Where in the previous Labour manifesto was such a pledge made—on what page, in what paragraph?

The Prime Minister: We certainly did say that we would reform the welfare state. I believe that the reform that we are introducing is the right reform, and I shall explain why. Since 1979, the number of people claiming incapacity benefit has trebled. Our reforms will not affect any existing claimants, but if we do not reform the system for the future, we will carry on running up large bills, while many people who are severely disabled and who genuinely need the help are not getting it.

As a result of our reforms, we will bring the system of incapacity benefit under control, as we should do, but we will also extend help to some of the most severely disabled. Some of those, particularly the younger severely disabled, will be better off by up to £30 a week.

Mr. Kennedy: Given that the principle of means testing incapacity benefit is established, the alarm bells should be ringing. Will the Prime Minister give the House and the country a categorical guarantee that he will not extend that principle to the basic state pension?

The Prime Minister: We have already said that. It is absolutely clear. The right hon. Gentleman says that to extend any form of means testing to incapacity benefit is wrong. We have extended means testing to other forms of contributory benefit, and of course incapacity benefit is taxed. In the end, it comes down to the simple question of how we spend the money that we propose to spend on disability and welfare.

For example, during this Parliament we shall spend an extra £2 billion on disabled people. *[Interruption.]* I have already answered the question about the basic state pension. The new deal for disabled people will give personal support and quality training to almost 1 million disabled people. We shall implement the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in full. We are setting up a Disability Rights Commission. We have introduced the disability rights task force. We are helping carers of disabled people with new pension rights and the opportunity to take a break from their responsibilities.

Those reforms mean that more disabled children get help with mobility, and there is more help for severely disabled people, more help with rehabilitation for those people who want to work, and more help with retention so that those developing a disability can stay in their job. That is a good package for disabled people as a whole. *[Interruption.]* To Conservative Members who are shouting—[HON. MEMBERS: "Look behind you."] At this moment I am looking in front of me.

Madam Speaker: Order. This is extremely time consuming. *[Interruption.]* Order. I shall suspend the sitting. I have had enough of hon. Members interrupting.

The Prime Minister: It is right that the country should know that the Conservatives want to slash welfare bills, but they support every single one of the measures that would increase bills. In particular, in the past two days, we have discovered that they support a measure in the Immigration and Asylum Bill that would increase spending on benefits for asylum seekers by £500 million, and which would reverse a change introduced by the very Minister who is now shadow Home Secretary. The country can tell the difference between serious opposition and serious opportunism.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to extend the sympathy and support of the House to the people of Orissa whose lives have been devastated by the cyclone? Will he ensure that Britain plays a prominent role in all the aid and development work that is necessary from us and our partners in the international community to restore those people's livelihoods?

The Prime Minister: I entirely concur with my hon. Friend. We extend our deepest sympathy to the victims of that disaster. I have just spoken to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, and she informs me that we are contributing to the international fund that has been set up to tackle the disaster. In due course, as fresh information reaches us, I am sure that we will make further help available.

Q2. [95611] **Mr. Ronnie Fearn** (Southport): The millennium dome, which will undoubtedly be a success, entails the expenditure of £758 million. Of that, £399 million is from the lottery. How does the Prime Minister square that with the fact that St. Dunstan's, which cares for those who have been blinded in the service of their country, has applied three times for lottery grant and not received any? I wear my poppy with pride, as do many hon. Members. Many of those poppies have been made at St. Dunstan's.

The Prime Minister: I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that four fifths of the lottery stream goes to a host of other lottery causes. I cannot comment on the particular cause to which the hon. Gentleman draws attention.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): Make inquiries then.

The Prime Minister: I am happy to make inquiries, but it is not for me to distribute lottery money. That is done by the relevant organisation.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Victim Support is campaigning for victims and their families to have the right to be consulted and to be given the same information about the possible release of offenders held under the Mental Health Act 1983, as is offered in cases involving the release of convicted criminals from prison? Will he bring together the Department of Health and the Home Office to see how to resolve the current situation and give some peace of mind to victims and their families who have already suffered enough?

The Prime Minister: I assure my hon. Friend that we will take into account the views that she has expressed. In the Green Paper on the review of the Mental Health Act, we proposed that families should be given rights to information about the detention and release of restricted patients who have committed serious violent or sexual offences. We have also increased the funding of Victim Support by 50 per cent. since taking office. I am well

aware of people's concerns about the fact that they need to know about releases from prison. I am sure that we can deal with this in the way that I have described.

Q3. [95612] **Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): If achieving social and economic inclusion is the biggest challenge a Government can set themselves, what decisive action will the Prime Minister take to guarantee the efficient and effective delivery of public-matched funds to the poorest regions of the United Kingdom, namely European Union objective 1 regions?

The Prime Minister: We are looking at how we can make the proper arrangements for the co-ordination of matched funding. Under the new procedures and the new deal that we secured, 75 per cent. of the money for objective 1 comes from the European Union. That is a big increase on the previous position. As a result of objective 1 status being given to Cornwall, which is the area represented by the hon. Gentleman and others, it will receive some £320 million during the next seven years.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Will the Prime Minister reassure the House that the Government will not promise welfare changes that we cannot fund? Does he agree that any political party that simultaneously calls for a reduction in welfare spending as a proportion of GDP, argues that that can be achieved by cuts in welfare benefits and then votes for substantial amendments involving billions of pounds of extra expenditure comes, to use the words of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), dangerously close to hypocrisy?

The Prime Minister: That is right. People should be aware of the Conservative party's commitments in respect of cutting social security funding. If the Conservative party is to make its sums add up, it will have to cut certain things. It is already committed to cutting the new deal for the unemployed. That is help which the Conservative party will take away from 250,000 young people. It is also committed to abolishing the working families tax credit. That means that 2 million low income families will have money taken from them. Above all, having told us that it was reckless to promise extra social security spending on specific groups, every pensioner household should know that the £100 going to them next week will be taken off them by a future Conservative Government.

Q4. [95613] **Mr. Richard Spring** (West Suffolk): Is the Prime Minister aware that the House of Commons Library has decisively and definitively analysed his spending pledges, particularly on health and education, and shown that they are wholly misleading? Is he aware that there is no other country that takes it spending plans and double and treble counts them? Can we have some simple truth from the Prime Minister on this issue instead of the spin-doctoring and grotesque manipulation of the figures that we have from him and his Ministers?

The Prime Minister: That is complete nonsense. The £40 billion for schools and hospitals is extra money over and above the present allocation. Expenditure during our first two years in office, including that extra money, has been more generous than Conservative spending plans. The hon. Gentleman belongs to a party that wants to cut money for schools, hospitals, the police and transport. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes, it does. The shadow Chancellor and the Leader of the Opposition have been to the CBI conference and elsewhere and have said that they would cut public spending and guarantee that everyone's tax would come down every year. They could not do that without cutting the money for schools, hospitals, law and order, transport and pensioners.

The Government are combining enterprise with fairness. We have sorted out the mess in public finances that the Conservatives left us. The only people who cannot criticise us on any public services are the Conservatives. At some point—at the next general election if not before—they will realise what a strategic blunder they have made.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Has my right hon. Friend examined the Ontario experience, where there has been a common-sense revolution? If so, is he aware that it has led to increased homelessness and poverty? Would not it be better to have a new definition of common sense—one that leads to modernisation and welfare reform with fairness and justice, rather than the division between poverty and wealth that the Tories' common-sense revolution would bring about?

The Prime Minister: The common-sense revolution and the election of the Conservative party is a contradiction in terms. When I went through the list of measures that it opposes, I forgot to mention that it is also opposed to the 20 per cent. increase in child benefit that came in this April. Not only would pensioners, working families and the young unemployed lose, but 7 million families would be worse off under the Tories.

Q5. [95614] **Mr. Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): I do not participate in blood sports, apart from Prime Minister's Question Time and paragliding, but I am in the Middle Way group, which seeks to find an alternative to either an outright ban on fox hunting or maintaining the status quo. Will the Prime Minister meet a cross-party delegation from the Middle Way group to hear our proposals for an independent hunting authority so as to move the debate forward?

The Prime Minister: I am always interested in third ways, but I have nothing to add to what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice), except that I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman's group.

Q6. [95615] **Ms Sandra Osborne** (Ayr): The news that Britain has destroyed its last operational anti-personnel mine three years ahead of schedule will be welcomed nationally and internationally? Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must keep up the pressure until every country has followed Britain's lead and taken action?

The Prime Minister: I confirm that the United Kingdom's anti-personnel land mine destruction programme has been completed, a full three years ahead of the time frame laid down in the Ottawa convention. The United Kingdom will never again use anti-personnel

land mines in military operations. We have led the way on this issue, and we hope that the rest of the world will follow.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): In 1997, when the Government came to power, people were putting more than 10 per cent. of their income into long-term savings. Two years later, the savings ratio has declined from more than 10 per cent. to less than 5 per cent. Why have the Government introduced policies that have been so deeply damaging?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that, and the most recent figures show an increase in the percentage of savings, not a decrease. I go back to the point that I made to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). As a result of the measures that we have taken, we have saved this country from what would certainly have happened if we had continued the policies of the previous Government when we came to office. Those policies would have landed us back in the cycle of recession that we were in twice under the Conservative Government. As a result of the help that we are giving, not least in the new welfare reform proposals for pensions, stakeholder pensions and pension reform, we will enable this country to keep the costs of pensions under control, and to bring pensions within the purview of many people currently denied them. Moreover, we will do so at the same time as running the most effective and confident economic policies that have been seen in this country for decades, and—if I may return to a theme that featured earlier in Prime Minister's questions—avoiding boom and bust.

Madam Speaker: Time is up. I call Mr. Gummer. *[Interruption.]* Order. I ask Members to leave quietly, particularly Opposition Members.

Multiple Retailer (Publication and Display of Ethical Sourcing Policies)

3.31 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require retailers with more than ten outlets to publish and display in each outlet a statement of their procurement policies in relation to child labour, slave labour and environmental protection.

Many British retailers currently take a seriously ethical view of the way in which they source their products. C and A, for example, operates the most up-to-date system to ensure that the products it sells come from countries and organisations that do not employ slave or child labour, and Marks and Spencer operates similar policies. Kingfisher's environmental policies provide for its various wood products to come only with the stamp of the Forestry Stewardship Council, thus ensuring that those products are from sustainable forests. A number of retailers employ the highest ethical standards. I believe that we should make it possible for them, as a matter of course, to make that public to every one of their customers, so that those customers can see that the products that they are buying have been chosen and secured from sources of which they can be proud.

We recently engaged in discussions about the purchase of pigmeat from welfare-friendly sources. Such issues are very proper concerns of British producers. Unfortunately, however, competitors often ignore such basic ethical considerations, and are therefore able to sell their products more cheaply.

The present situation will be complicated by the arrival on our shores of Wal-Mart, an American group which, over the years, has experienced considerable problems in explaining the sourcing of its products in both ethical and environmental terms. I want Wal-Mart to start in this country with a clean sheet: I want it to have to subscribe to the rules that I propose in the Bill. Those rules are very simple. I suggest that, in any chain with more than 10 outlets, the company's procurement policy in relation to ethical and environmental grounds should be displayed prominently. I also suggest that a detailed explanation of the way in which those general principles are implemented should be available to both customers and shareholders, and to head office.

That, surely, is not an unreasonable request. It will not give rise to extra red tape, because all decent companies could take such action tomorrow; what it will mean is that customers will know the price at which the low price that they pay has been bought. They will know that, if a company has undercut the general market, that is because the company is more efficient, not because it has done deals of which it should be ashamed.

This is especially important in view of the arrival of Wal-Mart. Throughout the United States are small towns whose high streets have been destroyed by the way in which that firm operates. As a Minister who sought to improve and to increase the viability of our high streets, I am concerned that we should not find that the incomer, Wal-Mart, does not meet the environmental standards that have increasingly been espoused by home-grown companies.

It is necessary to raise the matter for another reason. Of all the companies I know, Wal-Mart is the only one, before it had a single shop in Britain, to secure a special meeting between the Prime Minister and its senior executive here. The fact that Hillary Clinton is a former director of the Arkansas-based business did not, I am sure, do it any harm. Whatever was said at the meeting, many must be concerned that the odd nod or wink suggested that planning permission that would not be available to other companies might be available to Wal-Mart.

Such a deal would fundamentally damage not only retail businesses with which Wal-Mart will compete, but the high streets that are so important to the rebuilding of the centres of our great cities and market towns alike. The House should be considerably concerned about the standards and values of great retailers. In taking on board ethical and environmental considerations, our retailers have set an example that is better than that of the average retailer in the world. I want to give them the opportunity to compete on a level playing field.

I do not want to exclude people who take different views. I want people to know what the price of "cut price" is. If they know that, and still buy products that are produced in the appalling conditions that have been revealed recently in islands in Asia, where people are corralled to work for a pittance and can only earn enough to get back to their home in that workplace, that will be up to consumers. Such conditions bring globalisation and the World Trade Organisation into disrepute.

It is of great importance that those of us who are committed to free trade should remind the House that it was here that Conservatives such as Wilberforce and Shaftesbury said that free trade should be within proper civilised parameters. Those include ensuring that slave labour and child labour are not the means of reducing prices, and that damaging the countryside shall not be the price of ensuring that we can undercut competitors.

All those issues should be raised now, before companies get into their stride. We have seen what their stride has meant to other people in other nations; that is why the Bill should become law. It is for that simple reason that I want Wal-Mart to begin afresh—without all the background and history that have so besmirched the company—at least learning here that free enterprise and trade bring responsibility. Companies have to behave properly not just in this country, but in all countries where the vulnerability of people is much greater than here.

It is for those people that we banned the slave trade. It is for those people that we should seek to ban the use of products of slave labour.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Gummer, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. Anthony Steen, Mr. Richard Spring, Mr. Peter Lilley, Sir David Madel, Mr. David Ruffley.

MULTIPLE RETAILER (PUBLICATION AND DISPLAY OF ETHICAL SOURCING POLICIES)

Mr. John Gummer accordingly presented a Bill to require retailers with more than ten outlets to publish and display in each outlet a statement of their procurement policies in relation to child labour, slave labour and environmental protection: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 5 November, and to be printed [Bill 160].

Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill (Supplemental Allocation of Time)

3.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move,

That the Order of the House of 20th May 1999 be supplemented as follows—

Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion at midnight.

2.—(1) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order, namely:

Nos. 42 to 46, 1 to 41 and 47 to 191.

(2) Each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

TABLE

Lords amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Nos. 42 to 46	7.00 p.m.
Nos. 1 to 34	10.00 p.m.
Nos. 35 to 41, 47 to 191	Midnight.

3.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraphs 1 and 2.

(2) The Speaker shall—

(a) put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, the Question on any further Amendment of the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Lords Amendment or, as the case may be, in the Lords Amendment as amended,

(b) put forthwith the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment followed by the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in their Amendment or, as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended,

(c) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in a Lords Amendment, and

(d) put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(3) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments the Speaker shall put forthwith a single Question on any Amendments moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to the Lords Amendment.

Subsequent stages

4. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

5. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

6. For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion the Speaker shall—

(a) put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided, and the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair,

(b) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on or relevant to any of the remaining items in the Lords Message, and

(c) put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Reasons Committee

7. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

8.—(1) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

(2) Proceedings in the Committee shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion 30 minutes after their commencement.

(3) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with sub-paragraph (2) the Chairman shall—

(a) first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and has not yet been decided; and

(b) then put forthwith successively Questions on motions which may be made by a Minister of the Crown for assigning a Reason for disagreeing with the Lords in one of their Amendments.

(4) The proceedings of the Committee shall be reported without any further Question being put.

Miscellaneous

9. This paragraph applies to—

(a) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments,

(b) proceedings on any further Message from the Lords, and

(c) proceedings of the kind mentioned in paragraph 7.

10. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies.

11. Proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

12. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

13. Where proceedings on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House would, by virtue of Standing Order No. 24 (Urgent matters), commence at a time when proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies are in progress, the proceedings on the Motion shall be postponed to the conclusion of the proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies.

14. If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the conclusion of any proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

I suspect that most hon. Members will want to debate the substance of the Bill and the amendments, rather than the timetable motion. However, the Government have tabled a timetable motion to allow proper consideration of all those parts of the Bill, especially those parts in which hon. Members have expressed special interest—particularly the provisions on incapacity benefit, which we have arranged to debate first, so that they will be debated in prime time and proper consideration is given to them.

I shall not say anything more now—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: Yes, I certainly shall, but in a moment. I was going to say that I did not plan to take up any more

[Mr. Darling]

of the House's time now, so that we could get on to the real meat of the debate. However, as the hon. Gentleman has intervened, I shall give way to him.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Secretary of State explain the Government's thinking on allowing business to collapse early on Monday, but timetabling today's business?

Mr. Darling: As the hon. Gentleman should know—he is an Opposition Whip—that is a matter not for me, but for the business managers.

I do not have anything to add now. If hon. Members desire the Government's reply to any particular point, I shall deal with it.

3.42 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): The Opposition strongly oppose this guillotine, but we shall not divide the House on it, as a Division would eat into valuable time that we need to devote to the Bill's substance. I merely state how unhappy we are that the Government have managed the business in the past few days in such a manner as to limit scrutiny of the Bill to one extremely cramped sitting. It would have been perfectly possible to have the two-day debate on the Bill that Opposition Members requested.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) is absolutely right to say that it was extraordinary that we spent Monday debating the Record Copies of Acts motion, which was essentially concerned with whether Acts of Parliament should be printed on paper or vellum. We have spent a day on vellum, and we shall now have a day on disability benefits, widows' benefits, IR 35, and a host of other matters. It demonstrates a bizarre set of priorities.

We strongly deprecate the fact that it was not possible to find two days for a debate, and are confident that it would have been perfectly possible to debate all the relevant matters without needing a guillotine.

The Government are terrified of challenge and scrutiny. What a contrast with the promises in their original consultation document on welfare reform, which, in the foreword's final paragraph, states:

"It will take time. Frank Field"—

those were the days—

"has started the process in this Green Paper. Now that the process is under way, we want all the nation to be part of it. There will be consultation and time for discussion at every stage."

That promise was signed by "Tony Blair, Prime Minister". We know how much it was worth.

I should also like very briefly to mention the extraordinary events of last night, when the Government tabled a guillotine motion that would have made out of order any vote, at any stage, on any amendment not tabled by the Government. That was an outrageous attempt to restrict parliamentary scrutiny. However, under pressure from hon. Members on both sides of the House, the Government withdrew their initial guillotine motion, revised it and tabled the motion that we are now debating. The lesson that I draw from the episode is that Ministers were trying to bully the House. Hon. Members on both sides stood up to the bully. We did it last night on procedure and we can do it tonight on the substance.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I do not propose to give way. I have spoken very briefly. I oppose the motion, but I do not intend to press for a Division.

3.45 pm

Mr. Kaufman: As the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) will not give way, may I take one minute of the House's time to ask a rhetorical question? If the Conservatives believe not having enough time to discuss such issues is reprehensible, why, when they were in government, did they regularly kill Bills proposed by Labour Members to help the disabled simply by calling out "object"? Perhaps they could inscribe that on vellum and explain it.

If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's concessions of £200 million are not enough, perhaps the Conservatives could explain how much more they would spend and how they would raise the money. Time may be limited, but they have an opportunity to respond to questions that cry out for an answer, in view of the hypocrisy that pervades their party on the issue.

3.46 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I certainly cannot answer the rhetorical question from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I have some sympathy with his expression of concern. However, the guillotine motion is different from most of those that have come before the House under successive Governments. We have always opposed them and shall continue to do so. We would have opposed the motion in the Division Lobby this evening, but we want to avoid taking useful time out of the debate.

The motion is particularly disreputable. I hope that Labour Members will analyse it carefully. The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats made it clear to the Leader of the House last week that we were only too happy to devote two days to this very important Bill. Two days were available. On the past two nights, debates have petered out and the House has risen early because the subjects did not deserve the time allocated to them.

The Government were unwilling to allocate two days to the Bill, not because they wanted to allocate less time, but because they did not want prime media time to be available to Back-Bench Labour Members. That is why the Bill has been compressed into this evening. We even offered to go beyond midnight tonight on the Bill, as did the Conservatives, to ensure that there was proper time for the consideration of all the amendments.

As the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has said, the motion tabled last night was designed not to gag the Liberal Democrats or the Conservatives, but to gag Labour Back Benchers who disagreed on principle with the Government. The guillotine motion is aimed not at the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats, but at those Labour Members—members of the governing party—who have dared to put their heads above the parapet. They should look at the motion in detail. Every part of it has

been designed deliberately to gag Labour Members who happen not to accept the control freak autocracy of their Front Benchers.

All hon. Members sitting opposite me—I trust that they are all honourable Members—should look carefully at how the Government have lost their nerve on the Bill. They are so proud of what they are doing that they are deliberately forcing it down the throats not of us or of the Conservatives, but of Labour Members. As the evening progresses, I hope that Labour Members will refuse to accept that dishonourable conduct.

3.50 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The timetable will give little time between 10 o'clock and midnight to discuss the issue of service companies. The House should be aware of the distress that that will cause outside, particularly as the proposals on service companies were proposed on Report, which meant that they were unable to be subject to scrutiny in Committee. The proposals went to the other place, where they were subject to detailed scrutiny.

Between 10 o'clock and midnight, the House will have to discuss 150 Lords amendments and no fewer than 40 Government amendments to Lords amendments, most of which affect service companies. This demonstrates the contempt of the Government for entrepreneurs who cannot afford to take their holidays in Italy at somebody else's expense. Many individuals have taken time off today to come to this House to see our democracy at work, and they will find it most unlikely that there will be any proper debate on the amendments passed in another place. The Government have recognised that these amendments have substance, as they have tabled 40 amendments relating to them.

If the Government were to explain properly the implications of their 40 amendments—as they would have to have done in Committee—that would take up most of the two hours. The Government are steamrollering this provision through, and the people of this country should be aware of the utter contempt in which the Government hold them. This is yet another example of the Government's gross and unacceptable arrogance.

3.51 pm

Mr. Darling: There is nothing unusual about a Government guillotining measures in the House. I was elected in 1987—by definition, much of the time since has been under Conservative Governments—and I can remember guillotine after guillotine being imposed by the Conservatives. I remember a Finance Bill one year in which a guillotine was imposed after only three or four hours of debate.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) might be interested to know that, on the Social Security Bill 1990, the Conservative Government imposed a guillotine of just three hours in a debate which sought to overturn 20 Lords amendments. We have several hours between now and midnight to debate essentially eight measures.

From my experience in the House, I believe that a timetable motion can sometimes lead to better and more debate than if time is taken up by vote after vote. These votes are sometimes provoked by Back Benchers—we have seen this from Conservative Members—simply as a filibustering exercise.

When we last debated the Bill—again under a timetable motion—the quality of the debate and the orderly and civil manner in which it was conducted were a credit to the House. Our proposals will achieve orderly debate, and if hon. Members organise and discipline themselves properly, all matters of concern will be fully and properly debated.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): The Secretary of State has understandably chided the Conservatives for the hypocrisy of their stance on guillotines. Will he share with the House his hypocrisy as, when he was in opposition, he would have said the same thing that the Conservatives are saying now?

Mr. Darling: I have always believed that there is a case for timetabling a lot of Government business—it would be much better debated if that were the case.

Turning to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), I do not know what the Liberal Democrats' definition of prime time is. However, I would have thought that if this House has prime time, this is it. Business starts at 3.30 pm every day. We have arranged for probably the most controversial part of the Bill to be discussed in prime time—in good time for the evening news bulletins and tomorrow's newspapers. The hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that it would be better if we went on into the middle of the night. I do not know if that is the Liberal Democrats' prime time, but to me prime time is now. The Government are actually facilitating debate in prime time.

Mr. Tyler: Is the Secretary of State aware that both the main Opposition parties offered full consultation and co-operation in taking this stage of the Bill yesterday at this time, allowing two full days of debate?

Mr. Darling: I was not aware of that, but that is a matter for the usual channels to discuss—as they frequently do. I find the concern of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats for the well-being of my Labour colleagues interesting, but despite that—

Mr. Willetts *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I was going to say that I sense that most hon. Members would like to get on to the substance of the Bill rather than discussing the timetable, but as a matter of courtesy I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Willetts: We have just discovered that the Secretary of State was not aware of the offer of two days. Was he aware of the original draft of the guillotine motion, which would have excluded all voting on any amendments other than the Government's?

Mr. Darling: Yes, I was, and this is a far better motion, showing that the Government are more than happy to have the debate. I do not shrink from that debate, and I urge the House now to move on to the substance of the business before us rather than spending any more time discussing a timetable motion that it would seem we are all largely agreed on.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Order of the House of 20th May 1999 be supplemented as follows—

Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion at midnight.

2.—(1) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order, namely:

Nos. 42 to 46, 1 to 41 and 47 to 191.

(2) Each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

TABLE

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Subsequent stages

4. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

5. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

6. For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion the Speaker shall—

(a) put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided, and the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair,

(b) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on or relevant to any of the remaining items in the Lords Message, and

(c) put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Reasons Committee

7. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

8.—(1) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

(2) Proceedings in the Committee shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion 30 minutes after their commencement.

(3) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with sub-paragraph (2) the Chairman shall—

(a) first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and has not yet been decided; and

(b) then put forthwith successively Questions on motions which may be made by a Minister of the Crown for assigning a Reason for disagreeing with the Lords in one of their Amendments.

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Miscellaneous

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11. Proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

12. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

13. Where proceedings on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House would, by virtue of Standing Order No. 24 (Urgent matters), commence at a time when proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies are in progress, the proceedings on the Motion shall be postponed to the conclusion of the proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies.

14. If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the conclusion of any proceedings to which paragraph 9 applies, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Madam Speaker: I must draw the House's attention to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 1, 20, 33, 34, 40, 42 to 44, 46, 137 and 156, which are to be considered today. If the House agrees to any of these Lords amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Clause 57

INCAPACITY BENEFIT: RESTRICTION TO RECENT CONTRIBUTORS

Lords amendment: No. 42, to leave out clause 57.

3.56 pm

Mr. Darling: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendments (c), (a), (b) and (d) related thereto, Lords amendment No. 43 and Government amendments (c), (a), (b), (d) and (e) related thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 44 and 45, Lords amendment No. 46 and amendments (a) to (d) in lieu thereof, and Lords amendment No. 183.

Mr. Darling: This part of the debate covers our proposed reforms of incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance. The proposals, originally made by the Government and now amended by the House of Lords, are part of a wider package of support for disabled people.

I want to set our proposed amendments in lieu of the Lords amendments in their proper context. They are part of a wider package that will provide more help for disabled children through increased benefits, with an extra £37 for severely disabled three and four-year-olds; and up to £26.40 more for people disabled at birth, or from an early age. Both those increases are made possible by the Bill.

The new disability income guarantee will provide £5 more a week for single people and £8 for a couple. The disabled persons tax credit is worth at least £155 a week, underpinned by the new deal for disabled people. We are also providing £140 million to help carers and introducing new pension rights.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said earlier this afternoon, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has now been implemented and the Disability Rights Commission set up to secure civil rights for disabled people. That has all been delivered by this Labour Government and opposed by the Conservative party.

In two years, we have done more to help disabled people than the Tories did in 18, and we have a lot more to do. It is important for the House to understand that there are two principles underpinning our approach and our reforms. The first is that we need to do more for people who need help most and the second is that we need to build a welfare state that reflects both the world of today and the needs of tomorrow, promoting work for those who can—including the 1 million disabled people who want to work—and providing far more security than in the past for those who cannot.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Of those 1 million disabled people who want to work, how many will receive the disabled persons tax credit?

Mr. Darling: That of course depends on the take-up. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman in the nicest possible way that if he had had his way there would not be a new deal for disabled people. He opposed the new deal. He cannot have it both ways. We are providing help that has never been there before; it would certainly not have been there under a Conservative Government, and the Liberals have also opposed the key measures that we have taken.

I want to deal with our proposals on severe disablement allowance. The existing SDA is inefficient and poorly targeted at those whom it was originally meant to help. It is worth remembering that nearly 70 per cent. of people on SDA are on income support. The allowance was meant to help various groups, and children in particular, but I do not believe that it does so. The first thing that our reforms will achieve is to do more for people who need help most. Right now the system is not doing enough, but this Bill starts to put that right.

We want to do more for the many people disabled from birth, and in childhood, who have had no chance to work and no chance to make national insurance contributions. Today, those children get so little—£54.40 a week—that they need income support for the rest of their lives. No decent Government can tolerate that and certainly no Labour Government can tolerate it.

We are reforming SDA and providing more help for disabled young people by giving them incapacity benefit without asking them to satisfy the usual conditions. That will mean that they will get nearly £27 more every week. That is the right, decent and fair thing to do and it will mean that 175,000 people will be better off. The reform is long overdue and should be supported. I urge my hon. Friends to support it.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I accept without reservation the need for those young people to get additional help, but why has that to be at the expense of other disabled people? Should not the reform be funded from the 1p that the Chancellor took off income tax instead?

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman should remember two points. First, as I have said, severe disability allowance is so low that nearly 70 per cent. of those in receipt of it rely on income support and only a minority see any benefit from it. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman welcomes the additional help that we are providing for young children. The second point concerns spending, and many of my hon. Friends have also asked about that. It is true that the measures before the House today will, in the long term, achieve savings. That is of necessity, because of the way that the system works. However, as a result of measures that the Government have taken in the past two years, we are spending £195 million on the new deal for disabled people; £79 million on the new ONE service, which gives better help and guidance through the benefits system; £30 million on rehabilitation and retention pilots; £15 million on disabled children; and £40 million on the

[Mr. Darling]

disabled person's tax credit. We have also introduced new linking rules to help people try out work and not lose their benefit entitlement. We have introduced the disability income guarantee and are spending £140 million on the carers strategy. In the long term, £7 billion will be credited to disabled people and carers through the new state second pension.

The Government are happy to spend more money on disabled people. That is the right thing to do. It is what the public expect us to do, but they also expect us to examine the social security system from time to time and ask whether it is up to date and reflects modern conditions, so that we make sure that all the money we spend goes to those whom the public want to be supported. They want the new deal and they want carers and the severely disabled to be helped. We are doing that, and I am proud of the fact that a Labour Government will spend more this Parliament, and more in years to come, on disabled people. That is what people elected us to do, but they also asked us not to shrink from examining the system and bringing it up to date.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that people with incomes above income support levels are wealthy? Is not it true that if someone with 80 per cent. disability has £3,000 of savings, £8,000 of capital or a spouse who works, he or she will not receive anything?

Mr. Darling: I am certainly not saying that people on income support are wealthy. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the capital limits, about which he made no protest for some 12 years during the Tory Government. In our pensions Green Paper, published last December, we said that we wanted to do something about the capital limits, because we want to encourage people to save and to be better off. It is far better to ensure that we provide real help, properly directed, to those children who lost out.

Mr. Pickles: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: No, I shall not let the hon. Gentleman back in, as he knows that this debate is timetabled. However, if he is so bothered about people who are disabled or on low incomes, he must ask himself why he was part of a Government who, for years, did nothing about that problem.

I give way to the one member of the Conservative party who is sitting on the Opposition Back Benches.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): As the Secretary of State knows, I served all the way through the Standing Committee considering the Bill. He has made the point about achieving value for money in welfare spending, but does he accept that there is no surer way to boost welfare spending unproductively than through the introduction of more and more means tests, which discourage people from helping themselves and from saving?

Mr. Darling: The Tories doubled means testing in their 18 years in power, and the hon. Gentleman did not object once. Another way to boost welfare spending without achieving any sense of direction is through the tabling of amendments in another place that would cost £4 billion. That is what the Tories have done, even though they cannot fund the costs incurred and cannot explain how those amendments would be paid for. The Government are ensuring that help is directed to those people who need it most. At the same time, we are ensuring that the benefits system is up to date.

I turn now to the two changes that we are introducing to incapacity benefit. The first thing to emphasise—and I shall do so repeatedly, as it is so important—is that the proposed changes are for the future. No existing beneficiary at the time when the changes are introduced—probably in 2001—will be affected by anything that we propose today.

Our proposal is that some of the early retirement income—the occupational pensions—that people on incapacity benefit draw down should be taken into account. Anyone designing a benefit system today would make sure that it provided most help for those most in need. I do not believe that we can ignore the fact that times have changed. Fifty years ago, only a minority of people had private pension cover: today, the majority have. The result is that many people now leave the labour market early with good incomes from private cover.

As I said earlier, it is right that the Government should examine the social security system to make sure that it reflects such changes. That is what will happen in the future. People have occupational pensions—good pensions, in many cases—and draw down on them to replace income in precisely the same way that people took up the original incapacity benefit. It is right that the cost of that early retirement should be shared and that account be taken of the income that those people receive.

I have listened to the concerns about the threshold that have been raised by hon. Members of all parties, and I have paid particular attention to what has been said by Labour Members. I said that I would reflect on what hon. Members had to say after the Bill left this House in May. I have done that, and have tabled further proposals. However, I remind the House of what we have already done, and of what we now propose.

We are already exempting people with the severest disabilities—the group for whom disability income guarantee is intended, and to whom the rules simply will not apply. However, we are going further than that. We are raising the threshold that I originally proposed from £50 to £85.

What will be the effect of that? It will mean that an occupational pension drawn down early will not be taken into account until all income—that is, incapacity benefit and income from a private pension—exceeds £151 a week. People will not lose all their incapacity benefit until their pension income reaches nearly £220 a week. For couples, the figure will be about £15,000 a year; for people with two children, it will be about £18,000. The House should remember that some of the people involved, depending on their condition, will get non-means tested disability living allowance on top of that. That allowance is worth up to £72 a week.

By raising that threshold to £85 a week, a further 100,000 people will be exempted from my original proposal. I believe that this measure ought to be supported by hon. Members of all parties. It is a significant change, and it is the right thing to do.

It is important to remember that about one third of people receiving incapacity benefit have occupational pensions, and that half of them are in the top half of the income

bracket. It is right to take that change into account. The majority of people on IB will not be affected as they do not have occupational pensions, and not many of them have pensions of more than £85 a week. Because we want to spend far more on people who have lost out in the past, we need to examine the system to see whether it reflects modern conditions. The Government should not ignore the fact that half the people receiving IB who have occupational pensions are in the top half of the income bracket. However, I repeat that people who do not have income from a private pension of £85 a week or more will not be affected.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): When my right hon. Friend says that the majority of people are in the top half of the income scale, is that before or after they are paid benefit? Will the means test be based on households or on individual earnings?

Mr. Darling: I am talking about individuals, and about their total income.

I should like to say a word about the amendment originally tabled in the other place by Lord Ashley.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): We very much appreciate all that is being done to help disabled people. But if the £85 is a set figure, it will reduce in value by 25 per cent. over 10 years, and by 50 per cent. over 20 years. Therefore, progressively fewer people will benefit from it. Can my right hon. Friend explain what the then Under-Secretary—now the Financial Secretary to the Treasury—could not at the last vote? Why do we think it impossible for a millionaire to pay more than 40 per cent. of his income in taxation, while it is all right for a retired disabled person to lose 50 per cent. of the value of his income and then to pay tax on the remainder?

Mr. Darling: Let me deal first with my right hon. Friend's comment about the taper. I do not think that it is right to compare the tax rates with the tapers in the benefit system. As my right hon. Friend well knows, the tapers operated in the benefit system are generally much higher than 50 per cent. The housing benefit taper is 65 per cent., and the taper of 50 per cent. proposed in this measure is one of the lowest in the system. Even the working families tax credit which is, quite rightly, very generous, has a taper of 55 per cent.

My right hon. Friend also raised a very important point about the figure of £85. Let me repeat what I said about the original proposal of £50 when the matter was last before the House. The figure of £85 is provided for in the Bill—that is the minimum. The Government will review that figure every year to ensure that it does not steadily erode the value of people's occupational pensions, as my right hon. Friend suggests. I believe that the Government's proposed increase from £50 to £85 is right—it is about the level of an average occupational pension. I give the House a clear, unequivocal commitment that we will keep that figure under review to ensure that it is increased and does not erode the value of people's savings.

4.15 pm

Mr. Alan Williams: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and accept the sincerity of his offer. However, future Secretaries of State of other denominations may not be as kindly disposed. To achieve his objective, could he not provide for this most readily by including in the Bill the indexation of this sum?

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend raises a pretty fundamental point, and I am sorry that I do not have an answer. I do not know any way of putting in legislation a provision that cannot be tampered with by succeeding Governments. If there were any way of doing that, many Governments would have done it. The Conservatives are pledged to slash social security spending if they get back into office. Given their commitment to reducing everybody's income tax and corporation tax every year, it does not take much imagination to realise that they will have to cut social security spending with a vengeance.

Our proposal is better than indexation, which might make only a small difference to the figure of £85. I assure my right hon. Friend on behalf of the Government and those of my successors that I can bind, that we shall keep the figure under review to ensure that its value does not erode and thus adversely affect people's savings. Indexation would mean that the increase might be a lot less than that which the Government might want to introduce in future. Therefore, I give my right hon. Friend an undertaking to review the figure, but I cannot go further.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The Bill will not be implemented until 2001. Will my right hon. Friend give a commitment to review the figure of £85 upwards to take account of increases in earnings or prices between now and 2001? Will he also give a commitment at least to annual uprating to take account of price movements?

Mr. Darling: I cannot add anything to my previous reply that I shall review the figure annually to ascertain whether we should raise it to avoid eroding the value of people's increased savings.

I did not realise that my hon. Friend was a fan of price uprating only. If she is, she tempts me to follow her. She probably expects us to do something better than that from time to time, but, if she will settle for price rating, I may one day follow her down that road—if not any other.

Dr. Jones: Will my right hon. Friend answer my question about uprating between now and 2001, when the Bill is introduced? The sum of £85 will not be worth as much in 2001 as it is today.

Mr. Darling: I have answered that question. The Government will keep the figure of £85 under review. The increase that we have made from £50 to £85 is right, but we will review the figure every year. We do not promise to uprate it every year, but we will review it to ensure that it does not adversely affect people's savings.

I want to comment briefly on the amendment that was tabled in another place by Lord Ashley. I want to focus on those in greatest need, and give them the most help. If the amendment were accepted, people who took early retirement and claimed incapacity benefit would continue to receive it until their private pensions reached £435 a week. The Government's proposals are sensible and right, and they should be supported.

[Mr. Darling]

The second change is our proposal to restore the link between incapacity benefit and work. We shall make two significant changes to our original proposals. First, we shall take account of the problems of people who suffer from degenerative conditions, such as multiple sclerosis or Parkinson's disease, which steadily reduce the ability to work. Both Houses expressed the fear that people in that position might lose entitlement to incapacity benefit. Our proposals will ensure that people who get the disabled person's tax credit and earn below the lower earnings limit will be able to get credits into the national insurance system and receive incapacity benefit. We have already done that for carers who receive invalid care allowance. Both groups will get incapacity benefit even if it is more than three years since they contributed.

I tabled the second change to our original proposals on Monday. It provides that contributions in the previous three—not only the previous two—tax years will count. Both changes will make a great difference to cases that have been raised with me in the House and elsewhere. For example, if the provision were in place now, someone who claimed incapacity benefit next month could receive it on the basis of contributions paid in April 1995. The contributions would be satisfied by 12 weeks of work for someone on the national minimum wage and a mere four weeks for someone on average earnings.

We have also introduced new linking rules, which mean that people who have received incapacity benefit, try out a job and find that it does not work, will not lose their entitlement to incapacity benefit. The one-year linking rule—two years for those receiving the disabled persons tax credit—ensures that.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is it true that the mechanics of operating the Government's scheme will be markedly more expensive than the proposals put forward by Lord Ashley? Can my right hon. Friend provide to the House the technical advice that he has received from actuaries and others about the sheer cost of the mechanics of operating the Government's proposals?

Mr. Darling: No, I do not think that the operation of our scheme will be more expensive. The mechanics of operating the system are the same no matter what the monetary limits happen to be. I am more than happy to allow my hon. Friend to speak to Government actuaries. I am sure that they would relish the opportunity to engage him for many hours, if he so wished, on the subject, although the Benefits Agency will probably have to implement the proposals. If he wants further information on that, I shall provide it. I do not think that it makes any difference whether the monetary limits are £85, £95 or £120; the mechanics of implementing the system are exactly the same.

Mr. Swinney: I do not wish to interrupt the dialogue on the faculty of actuaries' next consideration of these issues, but may I return the Secretary of State to his point about the concessions that he announced on Monday night? Will he share with the House what persuaded him of the merits of moving to include the last three years, and not the last two years, of contributions? Why did his proposal not go further?

Mr. Darling: On the move from two to three years, my objective when I published the proposals about 12 months ago was to ensure that there was a recent connection between someone working and his claiming incapacity benefit. Incapacity benefit was originally designed to replace income for people who were out of work. There is no exact science behind the choice of two years or three years, but I believe that three years is a sensible link. As I said, the period between someone having worked and his claiming incapacity benefit might effectively be four and a half years.

There is another important point. The Tories' only answer to long-term unemployment was incapacity benefit. There was no other help. Too often, people who came out of work were left to languish on the dole queues. The conditions of many of them deteriorated and they went on to incapacity benefit. This Government have introduced a large range of measures to help people who lose their jobs to get back into work. We have not only introduced tax and benefits changes, but provided help through the new deal and through the new ONE service. That help was never available in the past. We do not believe that, if people lose their jobs because their employer closes down or because of structural changes, that should be it and they should left high and dry with only one option available to them. They should not have to become sick so that they can get enough money to make ends meet. That can never be a humane policy response to the problems that they face.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will remember the briefing notes that he sent out about how the new proposals would work. In them, he cited several examples of the way in which welfare reforms would affect different people. One of the examples in the original briefing referred to Dave, an unemployed binman who had been made redundant six years earlier and then suffered a stroke. However, Dave disappeared from the corrected version that was published later. Will the circumstances of someone with an intermittent employment record be covered by the proposed framework that my right hon. Friend now intends to put in place?

Mr. Darling: I shall set about a search for Dave as soon as I sit down, but I do not think that he has disappeared. I shall try to answer my hon. Friend's point—if not for Dave, then for Dave's mates or his replacement.

As I said to the House a few moments ago, the contribution conditions can be satisfied by someone on average earnings having completed four weeks' work in the preceding three years. The period is 12 weeks for someone on the minimum wage. I have also said that, when someone is trying out work after perhaps having been on benefit, he will be able to be credited back into the system through the credits that we are offering. In addition, people with degenerative conditions will also be helped because of the changes that we are making through the disabled persons tax credit.

Our objective is to ensure that, as far as possible, people who can work are helped to do so through a variety of means. We also want to ensure that when a person is working intermittently, the contribution conditions are such that if, eventually, they cannot continue to work, they are not stopped from receiving incapacity benefit.

The reforms are part of a wider package of support for disabled people. The disability income guarantee, the disabled person's tax credit and the Disability Rights Commission are all welcomed by most people—although they are all, of course, opposed by the Tory party. The reforms are also part of a wider welfare reform Bill before the House. We are introducing new measures to help people to get back to work because we are not prepared to put up with people being left with absolutely no help, through no fault of their own, because they have lost their job.

The Bill also introduces stakeholder pensions, which will help people with an intermittent work record. It delivers pension rights on divorce. It delivers new help for bereaved families with young children. It is worth noting that about 175,000 people disabled from birth or a young age will gain, and that nearly 175,000 other people will gain from the disability income guarantee. About 40,000 women will gain from the proposed bereavement changes. About 25,000 women will benefit from the extension of statutory maternity pay to low-paid women, and 960,000 people—nearly 1 million—on low pay will benefit from the changes that we are making in national insurance contributions. Some millions will benefit from the stakeholder changes.

The Bill delivers real help for disabled children, and others who have never had help. It is part of a package that delivers real reform, real help, all of it delivered for the first time ever by this Labour Government, all of it opposed by the Tories. Their opposition tonight is based, not on principle, but on naked opportunism of a sort that we have not seen for many years.

I believe that the Government should be supported. We have a record to be proud of. The Bill should be supported, and the amendments that I put before the House should be supported. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Willetts: The Secretary of State has spoken as though he is bravely reforming an Attlee welfare state that has not been touched or reviewed or reformed for 50 years. That may be why he is so dismissive of the rebels on his own side and of the position that we, in the Conservative party, have adopted. He was pretty rude about his own rebels. He was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying:

"There are some in the Labour party who would vote against four sheets of blank paper."

Mr. Darling: I am used to good old-fashioned political knockabout, but what the hon. Gentleman just said is not true.

Mr. Willetts: If the right hon. Gentleman is denying the quote that appeared in *The Guardian*, I am happy to accept that correction.

The rebels can speak for themselves. I shall keep my remarks short so that as many as possible of them have an opportunity to speak. I want to tackle head on what the Secretary of State said at the end of his speech about what he described as the "naked opportunism" of our approach. I remind the Secretary of State that we constructed incapacity benefit. The benefit that he is messing around with tonight was introduced in 1995. That benefit was introduced while my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) was Secretary of State for Social Security. Conservative Members are perfectly entitled to defend a benefit that we constructed.

The Secretary of State is not suddenly examining disability benefits that have not been touched for 50 years: he is undermining a benefit that was introduced in the House and implemented only a few years ago.

As a result of the changes that we introduced when we were in office, both the number of incapacity benefit claimants and expenditure on incapacity benefit are falling. When the benefit was introduced, the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends attacked us for cutting expenditure, but we deliberately and carefully constructed a benefit that we thought correctly balanced the control of expenditure and fairness to disabled people.

4.30 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, in fact, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 enacted a change of name and up to a 50 per cent. reduction in benefit? He did not construct a benefit; he destructed a benefit system.

Mr. Willetts: Over time, reductions in entitlement to benefit were introduced and, certainly, one of our biggest single changes was to remove the earnings-related supplement to the previous invalidity benefit. The reason why we did that—it was explicitly set out at the time—was that there was an increasing shift towards pension provision among people who left work early as a result of their growing disability. My predecessors—Secretaries of State in the previous Conservative Government—explicitly put that argument before the House. The justification for the measure was precisely that it would be part of a mixed economy in which there would be increasing access to pension savings. We oppose what the Secretary of State is doing because he is attacking part of our vision of the development of the social security system. We are defending exactly the argument that we used when we introduced the benefit only a few years ago.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): The hon. Gentleman is defending a system that left some disabled people too poor to qualify for incapacity benefit.

Mr. Willetts: I will not say that the system in 1997 was ideal. I am explaining that there was a logic to my right hon. and hon. Friends' construction of the benefit—consciously aiming at a mixture of occupational and personal pension provision and benefit. I thought that the vision of people increasingly having access to savings from pensions alongside benefit was one of the Government's principles too.

I have a copy of the Government's so-called "key messages on welfare reform". What does it say on the very front page? One of the bullet points refers to

"Providing for the future with new stakeholder pensions and encouragement for those who can save to do so."

I should like to hear the Secretary of State explain how the measures before the House are consistent with that statement from him of the Government's commitment to encouraging savings. It is simply inconsistent.

Mr. Darling *rose—*

Mr. Willetts: If the right hon. Gentleman wants to intervene to explain how penalising people for having an occupational pension is compatible with encouraging savings, I shall be very interested to hear him.

Mr. Darling: Of course it is the Government's objective to encourage saving for pensions and other eventualities in later life. However, it has always been a principle of the social security system that there comes a point at which we take into account people's means. It is a bit rich for a member of a party that vastly extended the way in which the Government take into account people's savings to criticise such an eminently sensible proposal. When people draw down good early-retirement pensions, we should take some of them—over a threshold—into account.

Mr. Willetts: I remind the Secretary of State of what he said in "A New Contract for Welfare". I know that the document causes him considerable embarrassment, as his actions are increasingly departing from the principles that he set out in it, but principle 2 is as follows:

"The public and private sector should work in partnership to ensure that, wherever possible, people are insured against foreseeable risks and make provision for their retirement."

That is the argument for people who are on incapacity benefit not being penalised for their entitlement to a retirement pension.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The Secretary of State's last intervention was woefully inadequate to meet the needs of the case. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the more than halving of the savings ratio—from 10.6 per cent. to under 5 per cent—in the first quarter of 1999, as a direct consequence of the Government's policy decisions, the Secretary of State at least owes the House an explanation of what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the incapacity benefit changes on the savings ratio which he has been busily running down?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. We have not heard from the Secretary of State any assessment of the long-term impact on behaviour of measures such as the one proposed. We have all learned from the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) that long-term implications for behaviour must be considered, as well as short-term apparent expenditure savings.

It is highly unlikely that the provisions will save the Secretary of State money. They will merely affect the way in which occupational pensions are provided and the terms on which people are entitled to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is right. The measure will deter people from occupational pension provision.

I shall risk another quotation from *The Guardian*. The Secretary of State may not disagree with it. It is from a document that was apparently circulating during our term in office. Clearly, ideas such as the one proposed by the Secretary of State were circulating under the previous Government. I shall quote from *The Guardian* the response of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), the then Secretary of State for Social Security:

"I do not favour this approach. Apart from the disincentives to make private provision it would introduce, I think it would raise some very difficult questions about the future of the contributory benefit system before we have fully thought through the direction we want to take."

The then Secretary of State for Social Security was saying that measures such as the present Secretary of State is introducing were wrong because they would attack private occupational pension provision and undermine the contributory principle. My right hon. Friend was right then, which is why he won the argument then.

The Secretary of State is not engaged in some bold Blairite reform of the welfare state. He is taking the tired old options from the Treasury cutting room floor of five years ago, and recycling them as though they were part of some bold vision for the future of social security. They are not. They are the options that were rejected then. We deliberately and consciously rejected them. They were not part of the model of incapacity benefit as we introduced it. We were right to reject them then, and that is why we shall vote against them again tonight.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I have just joined the debate, but I heard my hon. Friend refer to bold Blairite options in social security. Does he know of any such thing?

Mr. Willetts: The gap between the rhetoric in the document and the tired and desperate measures before the House lead one to doubt whether there is any such thing.

Let me scrutinise in more detail the means test proposed by the Secretary of State to penalise people for their occupational pensions. It is a means test hitherto unknown in the social security system. It does not take account of people's income in general. It simply takes account of one form of income. It penalises people only if they have an occupational or personal pension. They can have as much money as they like in a building society account and they can have PEPs, TESSAs and other financial savings. The one thing that they must not have is an occupational pension. That is a bizarre route for a Government who claim that they want to encourage occupational pension provision.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): There is a gap in the hon. Gentleman's argument. If he is arguing that the measures are an attack on savings and occupational pensions, why did he support his right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) in 1994, when the legislation introducing the benefit was going through? The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden said:

"Too many people regard invalidity benefit as a readily available supplement to their occupational pensions when they take early retirement."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1994; Vol. 236, c. 37.]

If that was an argument for reform then, why does not the hon. Gentleman support the argument for reform now?

Mr. Willetts: That was the argument for removing the earnings-related supplement. That is precisely the point. The argument was that people could not have the earnings-related supplement plus occupational pension provision. That is why we moved to a benefit that has a flat rate rather than an earnings-related element. That is

precisely the reason for the benefit as it is currently constructed, as I tried to explain to the House a moment ago.

Mr. Rooney *rose—*

Mr. Willetts: I have already accepted an intervention from the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State's Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), is urging me to accept the hon. Gentleman's intervention because she does not want any of her colleagues to speak in the debate. The fact that she wants me to accept the hon. Gentleman's intervention is another argument against doing so.

I referred briefly to the means test. I shall refer to two other pernicious aspects of the Government's proposals—the combined impact of the 50 per cent. rate of withdrawal, and the fact that the benefit is taxable. We accept that the benefit is taxable, of course. We regard as unacceptable the combined rate of 73 per cent. It will impose much higher rates of combined benefit withdrawal and taxation on people on low incomes than the Government say they are prepared to accept for people on high incomes.

The attack on the contributory principle is unacceptable. No private insurance company or private pension scheme could get away with changing the conditions for entitlement in the way that the Government propose. They would probably be breaking the law and would certainly be named and shamed by Ministers. People have a legitimate expectation, on the basis of their national insurance contributions, which the Government are undermining with no clear assessment of the distributional impact. There is no targeting or focusing on people with low incomes. They are simply changing the contributions test for receipt of the benefit in order to save money and, despite what the Secretary of State said, there is no assessment of the overall distributional impact of their measures.

We have made it clear that we are willing to look at ways in which further savings can be achieved in incapacity benefit—even though the measures that we introduced are already reducing the amount of expenditure on it. That should be done by properly policing the entitlement to benefit in the first place. That is what the all work test is supposed to do. The Disability Benefits Consortium is right to say:

> "If the Government believes that there are people on IB who are not sick or disabled then the way to deal with this is through the design and operation of the All Work Test."

That would have been the right way to set about achieving what the Secretary of State claims is his objective. These random measures, plucked from the cutting room floor of the Treasury, will have a distributional impact that he cannot defend. They will have a long-term effect on behaviour that will be perverse and damaging. They will undermine people's confidence in the contributory principle in which the Secretary of State claims he believes. They are measures that the House should reject.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I would love to spend some time attacking the Tories' record on disability issues, but I am here to speak in support of amendments in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Should the opportunity arise, which I am pretty certain it will not, I should like to press them to a Division later.

I ask myself why the Government are pursuing this course of action on incapacity benefit. What are the problems? The first problem is that the Government's proposals will reduce benefit for disabled people who are unable to work. Those disabled people, as future claimants, will have paid the existing national insurance contributions and been judged unfit for work according to a medical test with criteria set down by the Government of the day. Why should future claimants who have paid the current contributions and satisfied that medical test be worse off? For the life of me, I cannot answer that question.

I can say how many people will be affected. Even under my right hon. Friend's revised threshold, 310,000 disabled people who are unable to work will be worse off as a result of the proposals. A total of 110,000 will be worse off because of the restriction on the entitlement conditions whereby contribution has to have been made in the past three years, and 200,000 will be worse off because of the means test on those who are able to access incapacity benefit. That is my first problem with the proposals. Why are we making disabled people who are unable to work worse off? I cannot understand it.

The second reason why I cannot understand the proposal is that it is distracting attention from the path-breaking and progressive policies of this Government in support of disabled people. No Government have been as radical and progressive on rights for disabled people as this Government have been. The new Disability Rights Commission provides support, through the new deal and the disabled persons tax credit to enable disabled people to get back to work, and measures in the Bill provide increased benefits for severely disabled people. Those and many other measures show that this is the most progressive, ground-breaking Government on the rights of disabled people. I cannot for the life of me understand why they have allowed all that to be cast in the shadow of these cuts in social security benefits.

4.45 pm

Like many of my colleagues, I spent the summer attending meetings to promote the Disability Rights Commission. Within 20 seconds of my sitting down, people asked me why cuts were being made in invalidity benefit. I am concerned that those cuts are damaging the Government's wider programme.

I have not received a letter, a fax, a telephone call or an e-mail in support of the proposals. I do not know of an organisation of or for disabled people that supports them; indeed, I do not know of any organisation that supports them. I cannot find a member of the Government's disability rights task force who supports them. I have had some difficulty finding hon. Friends who honestly support these proposals. [Hon. Members: "Oh."] Until today perhaps.

It has been said that those of us who feel strongly about this matter reject the notion of welfare reform. That is not true. I am a passionate supporter of welfare reform, including most of the measures that the Government have introduced. I checked my dictionary about the meaning of the word "reform", and it says that to reform is to improve. Parliamentary reform and reform of the House

[Mr. Roger Berry]

of Lords is an improvement in the way in which Parliament and the House of Lords reflect the wider community in which we live. I cannot see how reducing benefit entitlement to disabled people who are unable to work can be described as an improvement. It is not an improvement for them.

Let us be clear: we are talking about incapacity benefit of £66.75 a week. We are not debating the case for a higher level of benefit. It is a debate about retaining the benefit for people who have paid contributions under the current system and are judged unfit for work according to criteria set down by the Government.

What reasons have been given for the measures? We were told that the previous Government used incapacity benefit to disguise unemployment, and that is why something must be done about it. That is an irrelevant point, because the Bill relates to future claimants. It does not matter what the previous Government did.

We were then told that spending on incapacity benefit was increasing. It is not: it is decreasing. It has been falling consistently since the benefit was introduced in 1995. We were told that we should means-test incapacity benefit because more people now have occupational or personal pensions. That was the justification used in 1995 when the previous Government removed the earnings-related component. That is a matter of public record.

The same argument could be made about the basic state pension. Many pensioners have occupational or personal pensions, not least because all Governments rightly encourage people to make personal provision for their retirement. The Government are opposed to means-testing the basic state pension. Why? Because that would penalise those who have saved for retirement, it would discourage future saving, and it is a contributory benefit.

The same is true of incapacity benefit. More means testing further reduces the incentive to save. It reduces benefit take-up, encourages dishonesty, and is costly to administer.

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I have been listening carefully to what my hon. Friend has been saying, and I think that it should be knocked on the head at an early stage. He erred in this respect: at Question Time the Prime Minister gave an unambiguous answer, making it clear that there was no thin end of the wedge, and that there was no thought that the retirement pension would be means tested through the taking into account of occupational pensions.

Mr. Berry: I did not mean to suggest that. Indeed, I did not suggest that. I specifically said that the Government were entirely opposed to means testing of the basic state pension, and expressed my strong support for their opposition. I raised the matter in order to suggest that the principles involved in not means-testing the basic state pension were the same as those involved in not means-testing incapacity benefit.

We are told that incapacity benefit was never intended for people who have been unemployed. In fact, it has always been the case that people can move from unemployment benefit to incapacity benefit, provided that they meet the contribution conditions and have the relevant medical test. The benefit was intended specifically to protect those whose health deteriorated while they were unemployed. If the benefit was never intended for those who had been unemployed, why did the contribution conditions never reflect that fact? The present contribution conditions are the same as those for invalidity benefit, which preceded incapacity benefit, and the same as those for sickness benefit, which was introduced in 1948.

Finally—this is not the final point that I want to make, but I know that others wish to speak—we are told that the proposal is all about helping those in the greatest need; that it is about helping the most severely disabled. On 20 April, however, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley), said:

> "We are not introducing the changes because we want to make savings to pay for improvement of other benefits for disabled people. We are introducing the changes because we believe that each one is right and proper and will improve the welfare of disabled people."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 20 April 1999; c. 874-75.]

Both those arguments cannot be correct, but one of them must be, and I think that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is right. The argument that savings in incapacity benefit are needed for help to be concentrated on the most severely disabled does not stand up. There will still be about £450 million worth of savings in incapacity benefit as a result of the most recent proposals—far more than the very welcome extra spending on disabled children and young people.

In any event, what would be the moral justification for increasing help for disabled children and young people, and reducing the benefits of other disabled people on low incomes to pay for it? Does not the whole of society have that responsibility?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend must not persist in the argument that, by increasing spending on the most vulnerable, we are somehow removing money from other disabled people. We are not. The savings that we shall make by this means are long-term. As I said earlier—I am sure that my hon. Friend was present—we are spending more money now to help the very people whom he and I want to help. That is extra money, new to the system.

Mr. Berry: I was referring to provisions in the Bill. Of course I acknowledge the extra spending that the Government are undertaking elsewhere.

The Secretary of State has indicated that he will raise the means-test threshold from £50 to £85 a week, but that the taper will remain at 50p. I think that that will leave many disabled people who are unable to work on very low incomes—they will be significantly worse off. The means test would begin with a total income of less than £8,000 a year, and all incapacity benefit would be lost at a little over £11,000. Pensioners paying the standard rate of income tax would lose not 50p but 73p in the pound.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): May I make a purely mathematical point? I agree with the drift of what my hon. Friend is saying. The clawback is high, but with a 22 per cent. tax rate the figure would be 61p, while with a 23 per cent. rate it would be 61.5p. One would have to do a bit of double accounting to arrive at 73p.

Mr. Berry: My understanding of the Bill is that the 50 per cent. relates to gross pension income. I am

prepared to re-read the Bill; perhaps I have misunderstood it. Whichever figure it is, however, those people will effectively pay more marginal tax than a millionaire: they will effectively pay far more tax than people on much higher incomes.

As the House will have gathered, I am not happy about the principle of means-testing incapacity benefit. I am deeply unhappy about it, but, like Lord Ashley and others in the other place, I have supported a compromise position, which is on the Order Paper. Its purpose was to reduce the impact on disabled people and to bring the matter to an end. Our threshold would be the level of the disability income guarantee—£128—which would provide a mechanism for uprating and safeguard the income of any disabled person with an income of less than £195 per week. I do not believe that, in this day and age, that is too generous. Reducing the taper to the standard income tax rate is not too generous, either.

It has been said that the proposal would exempt nearly everyone. That is not true. About 400,000 incapacity benefit recipients have a pension of over £50 a week—the original threshold level. The compromise would have rescued the poorest two thirds of those incapacity benefit recipients, while halving the Government's original savings. It was an honest attempt to meet the Government halfway.

I am sorry that the Government have felt unable to support that compromise, or anything near it. The Bill will return to the other place. I feel that, unfortunately, the best way for Members to show that they would like the Government to think again is to vote against the Government's motion to disagree with the Lords amendment. I feel that I have no alternative but, with very great regret, to vote against the Government's motion. I urge other right hon. and hon. Members to do the same.

Mr. Webb: It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), who has a reputation for fighting on behalf of disabled people. Tonight, he is doing the same again and deserves to be listened to. On a recent BBC radio programme, he and I were bracketed together by the Secretary of State as "the forces of conservatism", which is news to both of us. I will not lavish any further praise on the hon. Gentleman lest I undermine his position.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) discussed the history of the attempt to means-test incapacity benefit and rightly pointed out that it was considered and rejected by the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). Given what happened yesterday, the hon. Gentleman coyly failed to mention which person tried to foist on the previous Secretary of State the means-testing of incapacity benefit: one M. X. Portillo.

In the circumstances, perhaps the hon. Member for Havant does not want to remind the House that Mr. Portillo, who hopes to re-enter the House shortly, tried to persuade the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden to means-test incapacity benefit. All I can say is that the Secretary of State is doing what Michael Portillo wanted to do and the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden dared not do. It is a sad day when the Labour party has to deliver Michael Portillo's agenda.

We have discussed the marginal tax rates under the means test. The hon. Member for Kingswood was right. We clarified the position with the Library yesterday. It rang the Department of Social Security, which said that the 50 per cent. rate will apply to gross occupational pension income. If I am wrong, I will be happy to be interrupted by the Secretary of State. That 50 per cent. is on top of the income tax rate of 23 per cent., so, for every pound above the threshold, whatever it should be, someone who has saved through an occupational pension will lose 73p.

The Secretary of State told us that the taper of 50 per cent. was low for the benefits system—the Department of Social Security could be much nastier in means-testing. It set one of 50 per cent. or more on the working families tax credit and 60 per cent. on housing benefit. It is set one of 73 per cent. for people who save through company pensions—*[Interruption.]* The Minister of State says that the taper could be 100. Yes—if the price is right, and the Department really puts its mind to it—it could be 100.

5 pm

Does the hon. Gentleman, who has responsibility for pensions, really think that a 73 per cent. taper gives people an incentive to make more occupational savings? If he were in his 50s—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): He is.

Mr. Webb: I was not going to speculate on that. However, given that he is in his 50s, if he anticipated that early retirement might at some point be forced on him—who knows—does he think that, faced with a 73 per cent. marginal rate, it would be sensible for him to put extra money into an occupation pension? Clearly, it would not be sensible to contribute more, as the marginal rate is undoubtedly a disincentive to save.

Modernisation has been the Secretary of State's principal defence of the policy, which the Government say is designed to reform the welfare state and bring it up to date. What is the central tenet of that reform, as we march confidently into the new millennium? It is means testing. The Secretary of State has discovered a new strategy for a new millennium, to build a new welfare state, founded on a bright new vision for dealing with today's realities. That vision and that strategy is means testing. How can means testing be modernisation?

I thought that one of Labour's proudest boasts was about the post-war Labour Government and their role in establishing the welfare state, of which contributory social insurance was an integral part. There is no doubt that the Secretary of State is playing an instrumental role in dismantling the welfare state.

Mr. Brazier: I am listening very carefully to the hon. Gentleman's speech. Every time a Conservative Member makes a point on the principle of means testing, we hear, "That's what you did", but receive no coherent answer about the Government's policy. It will be very interesting to see whether the hon. Gentlemen receives a proper answer from the Government to his excellent question.

Mr. Webb: I should be most grateful for an answer to the question. Although the Government could easily point

[Mr. Webb]

out that the Tories doubled means testing—which is true, but regrettable—what is the Secretary of State's answer to my question? In a modern welfare state, why is it desirable to force more people on to the means test by limiting the contribution rules, means-testing occupational pensions and phasing out severe disablement allowance? How can that be the face of a modern welfare state? Is that the shape of things to come? We hear no answer.

The hon. Member for Kingswood raised the issue of means-testing the retirement pension. We all heard the Prime Minister say that he would not means-test the retirement pension, and I entirely welcome that assurance. However, once the principle has been breached, his successors, and those of the Secretary of State, will be able to tell the House, "We already means-test contributory benefits". All the arguments that the Secretary of State has used on incapacity benefit will be true in spades when applied to the retirement pension.

Angela Eagle: What about the jobseeker's allowance?

Mr. Webb: I am not sure why the Minister raises that, but assume that she does so because that was an example of the previous Government weakening the contributory principle. I expect that she opposed that change. Now, however, Ministers are engaged in a further undermining of the contributory principle.

I am sure that, in this Parliament, the Government will not means-test the retirement pension.

Dr. Lynne Jones: I might be able to enlighten the hon. Gentleman on that point. In 1987, in a debate on the Social Security Act 1988, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in opposing the means-testing of contributory unemployment benefits, said that those affected had

"shown thrift and foresight in providing for themselves"—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1987; Vol. 121, c. 671.]

and that he opposed the means-testing of unemployment benefit.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for drawing the House's attention to a previous comment by a leading member of the Government. The comment was true then, and it is true now.

My concern is not that the Government will means-test the retirement pension in this Parliament—we have the Prime Minister's assurance on that. However, what might happen in 10 or 15 years? The Minister of State has said that people retiring on the retirement pension will be living in penury. It is difficult enough to justify the current level of the retirement pension, but, after 10 or 15 years of price indexation, it will have fallen so far below the poverty line that there will be huge political pressure to put more money into it. At that point, a future Government may well say, "We will put money into the retirement pension, but do not want to do so for people with occupational pensions of £30,000 a year."

If we give in to the principle today, we shall be laying the future open to means-testing the retirement pension.

The Secretary of State has defended his attack on disabled people who have occupational pensions or dodgy contribution records by referring to the good things that the Government are doing for some other disabled people. More times than I care to remember he has mentioned the disabled persons tax credit, which was an afterthought of Government policy. Disability working allowance—its predecessor—went to just 16,000 people. The bright, shiny new disabled persons tax credit, which is the Government's in-work strategy for disabled people, will go to an extra 6,000. If anyone wants to intervene and correct me on that, I shall be happy to give way.

Mr. Levitt: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are 2 million disabled people in employment and a further 1 million who are not in employment but would like to be. It is certain that a significant proportion will qualify for the disabled persons tax credit—far more than for the DWA.

Mr. Webb: The Government's projections for spending on the tax credit assume 22,000 recipients. Even if the figure were 30,000 or 50,000, what is that compared with the 1 million whom the Government say want to work and cannot? It is a drop in the ocean—a fig leaf to cover the huge cuts that the Government are making for people who are unfit to work.

The spurious argument about the situation being a form of hidden unemployment has been raised yet again. If there are people on incapacity benefit who should not be, why not stop them claiming it in the first place rather than introducing measures that affect not just those who should not be claiming, but those who have every right to claim?

There is a fundamental principle of universality involved. When someone turns up at an NHS hospital, we do not tell them to go away because they are well off or have BUPA cover. Everyone is in the system. They have paid their taxes and their contributions, so they have a right to treatment on the NHS. That principle underlies social insurance. People make contributions during their working life and when they need help it is there for them. The rules do not change at the end of the game. The Government cannot say afterwards that someone is not entitled because they have made extra provision for themselves. Either provision is universal or it is not.

The Government say that they do not accept universality. They are moving towards mass means testing. If it was wrong of the Tories to double means testing, why is it right for the Government to extend it further?

Mr. Darling: I have been listening to this nonsense for some time. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government's proposals for the reform of the state second pension, which is a contributory pension, will mean that more people will get an increased amount. We are doubling the amount of money that people on £9,000 or below will get from that contributory benefit. We have a mixed social security system involving means-tested and contributory benefits. I have given an example of a contributory benefit that we are increasing. If the hon. Gentleman's argument was right, contributory benefits could never be changed or improved. When he sits down and thinks about that he must realise that it is nonsense.

Mr. Webb: I am sure that you will not allow me to stray too far in talking about the state second pension, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I should like to address that point. For the next 20 years, contributory pension

expenditure on the state second pension plus the state earnings-related pension will be lower because of the Government's policies. In 2050 or after another total eclipse they will be spending more, but, within 20 years, there will probably be no state second pension because some other Government will have ripped up the unfunded promise. It is the coming years that are relevant to people currently in their 50s and 60s. By 2050, plenty of us here, let alone today's pensioners, will be dead. In the next 20 years, the Government will be spending less on the contributory retirement pension than would have been the case without their reforms.

The Secretary of State mentioned benefits for carers under the state second pension. It will be 50 years before people can get a full state second pension. That is how long the reform will take, yet the Secretary of State justifies cuts to invalids over the coming five to 10 years on a promise 20 or 30 years down the line.

Mr. Darling: Utter rubbish.

Mr. Webb: Does the Secretary of State have the arguments to back that up? Heckling is easy, but has he brought an argument to the House?

Many Labour Members have difficult points to make—no one enjoys voting against their own party—and they deserve to be heard. The Secretary of State can easily dismiss the Tories because of their record, and he can choose to dismiss us. However, he has said that he will listen to his own Back Benchers who, I believe, are deeply dissatisfied with the direction of the Government. Means testing is not the future, it is the past. It is time that the Secretary of State thought again.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): We have heard some outright nonsense this afternoon, and I cannot resist addressing much of it. The welfare state was created 50 years ago, and times have changed. We are asked why it is right to look at this matter—it is right because the conditions are different. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) says—from a sedentary position—that the system was introduced in 1995. He is trying to mislead the House. We are looking at the whole benefits system, and the Tory reforms merely tinkered and renamed the system. We must look back to the system in 1991 and, prior to that, at sickness benefit, which was the precursor to the proposals that we are debating.

Sickness benefit is an income-replacement benefit. We are debating today—in a changed world—what we mean by that, and how we focus benefits. I support the proposals because I think that they are right. I do not do so because I wish to eke out some meagre resources, but because the proposals make sense. They make sense in terms of the national insurance contributory principle and in terms of how we use that principle now and in the future.

We must look at the link between the contribution and sickness benefit. We talk about national insurance contributions as if they pay only for that benefit, but we pay national insurance contributions for a range of things, and we get a great deal out of it. Some people get more out of it than others, but that is part of the redistribution within the system.

People talk as if we all had an individual fund. One of the problems is that there never was a fund. There is no state pension fund from which we get our pension. We have no fund for our hospital care. We have no personal fund if we become sick, disabled or unemployed. We pay today for today's recipients. To talk about a fund that does not exist is misleading, and to suggest that no one gets anything from his national insurance contributions is not true. We get a great deal.

On incapacity benefit, we must look at the poorest recipients, who are on income support. The debate has dismissed people on income support as if they were invisible. That is nonsense—they do exist. For the purposes of accounting we cannot simply act as though they do not exist, when clearly they do.

We must look at how we focus resources. Do we focus them on the most disabled, or the worst off? The Government's proposals contain an element of both. The most severely disabled are exempt from the measures and are protected. Consideration has been given to degenerative conditions, so that people need not have concerns about such a condition while they are in work. As their condition worsens and they can work less, credits will be made available. The national insurance system is being upheld yet again.

There is also the linked period between work and the receipt of a benefit—a reasonable period of three years which, depending on when one works and then makes a claim, can run to four to five years in some circumstances. To act as though the Government are introducing an onerous qualifying period is ridiculous. The tight link between the period of work and the receipt of benefit makes more sense.

5.15 pm

Mr. Pickles: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kali Mountford: I cannot resist the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Pickles: I have to tell the hon. Lady that she is not alone in that thought. *[Laughter.]* I am enjoying her speech, in which she has said that the three-year period is perfect. In Committee, she gave the same speech, but said that a two year period was perfect. Why is two years now wrong and three years better?

Kali Mountford: The hon. Gentleman will recall that I did not use the word "perfect"—I said that it was reasonable. The proposal is all the more reasonable now because we are witnessing—the hon. Gentleman may not be used to this—a Government who have listened and responded. I will try to resist him from now on.

Another problem with the debate has been the constant reference to the all work test. Some colleagues have not been watching what has gone on. I recall that people have been dissatisfied with the all work test, which was anathema to many—including those who have been lobbying for disabled people.

The all work test took no account of people's abilities, and that must be wrong. We have to change the system to one that recognises that people with disabilities also have abilities. In the past, we have had a national insurance contribution system from which benefits have developed. We must look to the future and at how we want society to be. We do not want a society that says that if someone becomes ill or disabled, we will simply write them off. Opposition Members may have heard me say that in Committee, but I say it because I believe it.

[Kali Mountford]

It cannot be right to have a system that discourages people from developing their full potential. We must look at this measure in the context of all the other measures that relate to it. People are applauding the new disability tax credit—it is a method by which we can support people who are getting back to work. If anyone thinks that a life on benefits—be it incapacity benefit at its slightly higher rate than jobseeker's allowance—is a joy for anybody, they have not lived on benefits.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Is living on £160 a week any great joy?

Kali Mountford: My hon. Friend is not considering the full implications of the proposals. We must look at the disability income guarantee and at how we get people back to work. People working for only 16 hours a week will now be able to get the disability tax credit.

Does someone on income support deserve less consideration than someone with an occupational pension? My answer is no. It has been said that people have made provision through their occupational pension for such circumstances. Lots of us have done so—not because we think that we will retire at 50, 55 or 60, but because we want to make provision for our old age.

People are pretending about what has gone on in the workplace, where there have been actions that we cannot condone. Employers have been looking at incapacity benefit and others as a top-up to get people out of the system altogether.

Mr. Brazier: If the hon. Lady's allegation is true—I believe it has some truth—surely the answer is to tighten the medical criteria, as we suggested in Committee, rather than to take it out on perfectly legitimate disabled people who have saved or earned a little more than the limits proposed by the Government.

Kali Mountford: The hon. Gentleman obviously was not listening to my arguments about the all work test. We have to consider how we can accommodate people who have medical conditions or disabilities and allow them to move into work and off benefits. The Conservative proposals could even trap them into benefit for much longer than any of us would have envisaged.

I do not want to make allegations about people cheating the system. People with genuine problems would be better off staying in their jobs with support rather than being told that we will find a way of getting them out because it would be more convenient. The fact that they have a genuine condition does not mean that it is right for them to rely solely on benefits. We should try to help people to stay in work if they are employed and to find work if they are not.

No one would try to pretend, however, that that is the solution for everyone. We will never have a perfect economy with 100 per cent. employment, but we should aim for it. People currently claiming incapacity benefit have a right to be part of the new economy and the growth that we expect to arise from other marvellous measures introduced by the Government. I could not resist saying that.

I want to challenge the Opposition on the notion that, because a declining number of people are in receipt of benefit and the expenditure is declining, it would not be right to consider changing the benefit. It is right to change the benefit and the conditions to tighten the link between qualifying for the benefit and the period of work, which consolidates the contributory principle of national insurance and focuses help on those who need it most, providing more help for the most disabled.

The Opposition suggest that we should change benefits only when they are too costly to the state. To take that to its logical conclusion begs the question whether they are suggesting that if expenditure on incapacity benefit rose, they would cut it.

Mr. Pickles: Not really.

Kali Mountford: I heard only a few moments ago the argument that expenditure on incapacity benefit was dropping, so it was not right to cut it. That sounds ridiculous to me.

Mr. Pickles: It was him over there who said it.

Kali Mountford: It was not my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) who said it; it was the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). He said that we were changing the benefit because its cost was rising, but that is simply not the case. We are changing it because to do so strengthens the system and provides proper protection for those who need it. I shall certainly oppose the Lords amendment tonight.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I wish that the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) had been at the meeting of the Social Security Committee this morning, where she could have heard an impassioned two-hour defence of the contributory principle by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), whose face during the last few minutes of her speech was a delight to watch.

I hesitate to take part in this debate. I understand that at the Labour party conference—I could not be there, as I was not invited—Bill Morris said:

> "Reform cannot be a private conversation between the few at the expense of the many."

I hesitate, because this debate is really between the Labour party establishment and those who feel passionately about poverty. I realise that I do not have the record of the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) in standing up for disabled people, but it is important for some of us to take part in the debate to show that we, too, feel passionately about the contributory principle. I agree with the right hon. Member for Birkenhead that it is the bedrock of society.

I sympathise with the Government's position, because they promised at the general election to reduce the costs of social failure, yet they find that the welfare budget is set to rise by more than £38 billion over the next three years. I do not criticise them for that, because all Governments have had to face the same problem. Until we have the courage to return to the contributory principle, we will not get any long-term reduction in the welfare budget. The Government have to find savings.

I also understand the Government's argument on incapacity benefit. To be fair, they are supported by recent research published by Sheffield Hallam university, arguing that three quarters of the 1.7 million people on incapacity benefit, costing £7.8 billion a year, are capable of work. Labour Members have often argued that incapacity benefit and its predecessors have been used to disguise the true level of unemployment. We know that to be true and that there is a scandal of many people who could work using the benefit; but is not the solution not to attack the contributory principle but to have a harder test and ensure that the all work test—or whatever it is renamed—identifies those who are capable of working, which does not happen at present?

Many have spoken of the position of those who have not paid their full national insurance contributions in one of the previous two or three years. I cannot understand the argument about whether it should be two, three, four or five years. It is a principle. Why is it right that people can pay full contributions for 30 years and be denied incapacity benefit if they stop paying them for one, two, three or four years? I cannot for the life of me see the logic. If one believes in the contributory principle, one believes that it confers a right.

There must be many cases in which people are afflicted with a gradually worsening condition, desperately try to stay in work and do not maintain their full contributions. They have contributed to society but the reform discriminates against them. Is that fair or right? There is a fundamental principle at stake.

Mr. Levitt: Those are exactly the circumstances in which the disabled persons tax credit would click in and assist the person involved.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman reinforces our point. The mechanisms are simply churning the money around and increasing means testing. I am not suggesting that the Government are increasing poverty. I respect the fact that Labour Members are concerned about poverty and the disabled. Our concern is that the Government are increasing means testing, which cannot be right.

Why, too, are we penalising people with very modest occupational or personal pensions? Why are the Government telling people in occupational pension schemes that may bring in a modest remuneration—be it £50 or £80 a week—that they will be penalised? That cannot make sense.

I hope that as many hon. Members as possible will lay aside for the moment their party loyalties and come to the conclusion that if we truly aspire, as I hope we do, to create a society in which everybody is encouraged to save for their retirement, for sickness and for the various vicissitudes of life, we must vote down the Government's so-called reforms.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): On one major point, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I agree—that our debate in May was excellent. I worried a little today at the beginning of the debate whether that quality would continue, until I heard from more of my right hon. and hon. Friends and, to be fair, from the Liberal Democrats. It has continued, but, with great regret, I have to tell the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and his colleagues that I cannot find it in my heart to respond to their contributions or to take lectures from them, in the knowledge that I sat year after year watching Conservative Members talk out civil rights Bill after civil rights Bill, including those introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry)—who made an excellent speech today—by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and by Alf Morris, who is now in the other place. I therefore address my remarks to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the House, but in particular to my hon. Friends as this important debate continues.

5.30 pm

I have been proud to be supportive of a Government who, in two short years, have done so much to benefit the lives of millions of our disabled fellow citizens, honouring the commitment I gave on behalf of the shadow Cabinet at the party conference before the general election. Of course, I warmly support many of the measures that the Government have introduced to help disabled people, many of which have been mentioned by my right hon. and hon. Friends. I welcome those measures, because it is right that those disabled people who can work should be given the opportunity and the help so to do. Like so many others, I have campaigned for years for those very principles and I am glad to see them being applied.

That said, it is important to establish that the measures we are discussing today concern some hundreds of thousands of disabled people who are incapable of working. That is the issue and the challenge. A job for them is a distant, elusive dream. If the Bill is passed tonight as it stands, all the evidence is that those people will be significantly poorer. I shall explain why.

Under the proposals, disabled people start to lose their weekly incapacity benefit when their annual income is less than £8,000 a year, which is below even the poverty line of half average income. Worse still, the benefit would be withdrawn at a penal rate—I respect the views of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but that it is the only way to describe it—of 50p in the pound. We are talking about people's incomes so it would be, in effect, a tax rate; but no other person in the land—not even the richest millionaire—is asked to pay such a rate.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) made an excellent speech, but if we genuinely believe that the present system is exploited, is it right to give a guarantee of continued income to those who we claim are only on the benefit because the Tories were massaging the unemployment figures, but to withhold the payments from new claimants? Given the problems of the all work test presented to me in surgery after surgery—I cannot believe that I am alone in that—it is not easy to qualify for that benefit, and I am not persuaded that the medical profession are so devious as to mislead the House of Commons or those whom they refer for the benefit.

Those who expected more from our Government are likely to feel deeply betrayed when they realise that people will be penalised for putting aside money to help build a nest egg over many years. The disincentive to save is so obvious that Conservative Members have pointed it out. My constituents have also asked me about it. People are bound to ask why they should save when it will mean that the benefits to which they are entitled will be cut. This goes against everything the Government are trying

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

to encourage and will lead to more people than ever relying on state handouts, which I thought we were trying to avoid. Where is the logic in that?

I have also to ask the Government why they have made no proposals in the Bill for uprating the £85 threshold. By the time April 2001 comes round, the value of that figure is bound to have been substantially reduced by inflation. I did not get the impression from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that he intends to change the level this side of April 2001. In my view, it is essential that a formula for uprating be built into the Bill, similar to the commitment commendably given to uprate the disability income guarantee annually.

The House is at its best when we discuss issues that our constituents are following, including perhaps some even now in their living rooms. That is how they judge us and why I wish to put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—I give him credit for listening—the views of MIND. In its briefing to all hon. Members, MIND says:

"People with a mental illness experience fluctuations in their symptoms, often preventing them from sustained employment. Labour market flexibility for this group means the ability to move in and out of work, as their mental health allows, with the minimum of financial penalty. This cannot be achieved if entitlement to National Insurance benefits is restricted."

Mind also described an individual case:

"John worked for ten years before developing a mental illness. When recovered he found it difficult to find another job, and three years later became ill again. Under the Government's proposals, John would not be entitled to Incapacity Benefit, despite his years of contributions."

That cannot be fair, but John is not alone. I suffered from ME, but I was fortunate that it was only for 20 months. Many people suffer from it for eight, nine, 10 or more years. Those people may have worked for 10, 20 or more years in transport, in local government, in the civil service or in education, but they would be excluded from incapacity benefit. I cannot find that fair.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that people who suffer from mental illness find it difficult to get a job because of the stigma associated with that problem?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right, and Mind makes that point elsewhere in its briefing. I make these points in the knowledge that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench are listening, and all of them have been helpful to me on constituency cases in the past. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and all my hon. Friends on the Front Bench have responded commendably on individual constituency cases. However, that does not mean that we should not get the Bill absolutely right before we send it back to another place. That is also the view of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Before the election, I was proud to campaign up and down the country, in my shadow role, on the Labour party's manifesto pledges to Britain's 8 million disabled people. Today, I have to say in all candour that I am worried about the gulf that has developed between disability organisations and a Government whom I am happy to support. That development could have been avoided, and I am convinced that it is still not too late to bring both sides together in partnership, as they have been on almost every other issue to do with disability over the past two years. That would benefit the Government and disabled people.

What are the disability organisations saying today? I take no pleasure in reading the view of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, which has stated:

"Unless the Government goes significantly further in its concessions to this Bill, its overall record towards disabled people will be permanently tarnished."

The Disability Benefits Consortium, which represents more than 250 disability organisations covering our 8 million disabled people, has called the Government's position on these narrow issues "morally repugnant". I find that deeply saddening. It is easy to dismiss newspapers, and especially leading articles in *The Guardian*, but in the light of all the Government's other splendid achievements on disability it is genuinely worrying when that newspaper can say that

"Ministers should not be robbing the poor to help the very poor".

I know that that view is widely shared.

This debate is not about bringing down the Government, nor is it about defeating the Bill. The Government will still get the Bill through in time for its implementation date, which I understand is still April 2001. The worst scenario would be that, as happened with the Bill that became the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1999, the measure would go straight into the next Session of Parliament in a matter of weeks, and be given Royal Assent under the Parliament Act 1911. However, we plead with the Government to take our concerns on board.

5.45 pm

Mr. Rooker: I hope that I did not misunderstand, but my right hon. Friend mentioned the Parliament Act 1911. That legislation can be used to push a Bill through the House on a fast-track basis only if the Bill takes the same form as it took when it was introduced originally. Therefore, if that mechanism were used, none of the changes that we propose today—nor any of the amendments that have been accepted in Committee, on Report or in another place—would be included.

We must knock on the head the idea that anything can be fast-tracked through and recognise that, in the eventuality to which my right hon. Friend refers, stakeholder pensions would not be in place before the next election. The Parliament Act does not work in the way described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke). The proof of that, as he will know, is that the War Crimes Bill had to go through the House in 1991 without any amendment. The reality, as the Clerks will confirm, is that the Parliament Act cannot be used to push through the amended Bill.

Mr. Clarke: As I said earlier, I have enormous respect for my hon. Friend, but I spent most of the afternoon with the Clerks. The advice that they gave to me is the same as that which I am giving the House. If my hon. Friend will forgive me for the moment, I shall stand by the advice that the Clerks gave me.

However, there is no need for the Bill to spill over into the next Session. The Government are the managers of their own business. They can get the Bill through if, as I

recommend, they involve themselves in dialogue with those Labour party members—our Friends—who are in another place.

This debate is about asking Parliament to accept that it is not beyond the wit of modern, sophisticated, inclusive Government to reach agreement in another place with rebels such as Lords Ashley, Morris and Barnett. Jack Ashley, Alf Morris and Joel Barnett are hardly three closet militants determined to wreck everything that the Government set out to achieve. There is no reason why a reasonable outcome to the debate—which is surely what we all seek—cannot be achieved.

I regret to have to say it, but the truth is that there is no popular support for the Government's position on these particular issues. There is, however, support for the rest of the Bill and for the Government's many achievements on disability. It is not as though we are in a dispute about a crucial manifesto commitment. No pledge was made about incapacity benefit. That benefit is worth £66.75 a week, but for poor people that amount represents a fortune, a fact to which many of my constituents will attest. Our decision is therefore absolutely crucial to them.

Even now, I plead with the Government and the House to give serious thought to the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry). I sincerely believe that they offer a real chance of a solution that could so easily unite the Labour party and restore the confidence of our people in the role of Parliament and in the democratic process.

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): I shall be brief, given the large number of hon. Members who wish to speak in the little time that remains. I shall confine my remarks to our concern about the Government's response to Lords amendment No. 46, which would continue severe disablement allowance.

The existence of a safety net for the most vulnerable is a matter of fundamental principle for Liberal Democrat Members. We sought and failed to find justification for the proposals in the Bill in the Labour party's pledge card or in its election manifesto. In the Government's much-trumpeted and proper commitment to challenge the causes of social exclusion we were unable to find any justification for the abolition of severe disablement allowance.

The proposal does not modernise the benefit system. It removes an essential safety net for a small but significant number of people. I am sure that Ministers are aware that, although income support will cover many people who will be unable to take up severe disablement allowance when it is abolished, many people will fall through the net. Women and carers will be especially hard hit, as they often are unable to build up the level of contributions necessary to secure incapacity benefit.

If the Government are concerned about low-income groups, benefits should be aimed at those groups. We need to recognise that women, carers and people in part-time work will find themselves in difficulty as a result of the proposals. People who become disabled and who previously worked as lollipop men or women, or who work at the supermarket checkout or as part-time caretakers at the local school, are often unable to achieve sufficient insurance contributions to secure incapacity benefit. At least in those cases the safety net of severe disablement allowance still applies.

The Government, thankfully, take the view that young people under 20 who are entitled to SDA now and in the future will have that support passported into incapacity benefit come their 20th birthday. Young carers looking after elderly or disabled relatives or anyone else who receives invalid care allowance will not be treated in the same way as those who have paid national insurance contributions and are also receiving the allowance. Young people who were previously entitled to SDA when they were under 20 are entitled to receive incapacity benefit when they get older but young carers are not. That anomaly must be ironed out.

Such examples have been brought to the Government's attention throughout the passage of the Bill, but they have failed to respond. Either the Government do not believe that such cases exist, or they do not care. We believe that there should be a safety net, but there are still gaps in it. The Government must sort out which side of the line they are on. This is a fundamental principle. Many severely disabled people—who have to be 80 per cent. disabled—will fall through the net and be considerably worse off.

We are told that adults receiving SDA will not be affected. Well, not yet—the Government will deal with them individually. Many people on SDA are worried by the Bill's message. Given the experience of the all work test and the other hurdles that they will no doubt have to overcome, they fear that their SDA will be taken away from them. Ministers may well shake their heads and say that that is not the intention. However, disabled people believe that the Government want to do away with SDA as quickly as possible, and that individual cases will be dealt with later.

It seems prophetic. First the Government came for the asylum seekers; then the Home Secretary sought to make scapegoats of the travellers, and now we fear that the Government will go for disabled people. We look forward to hearing the voice of conscience in this debate. Ministers may consider that their Back Benchers are an electoral liability, but they will be an electoral asset in future. On this issue, the Government need to be saved from themselves.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): With regard to the closing remarks of the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George), every time I hear a politician talk about conscience, I run for my sick bag. We are all trying to act for the best, and no one has a monopoly on conscience.

This is a highly emotional subject and hon. Members on both sides of the House have made detailed contributions. The arguments seem to be a cross between metaphysics and statistics and, as I know little about either subject, I shall stick to the principles involved.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) said that if the benefit were related to a pension it would somehow stop people having a pension and make them claim benefit. Nothing could be further from the truth. I agree that facts are not available to prove the case, so we must stick to opinions.

I do not usually use myself as an example, but I should like to tell the House something from my own experience. I do so because the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) asked what a 54-year-old man with a disability would do if he had to give up his job. There is no need to hypothesise—I am that man. I have lived with

[Mr. Sam Galbraith]

a disability for 10 years since I had a lung transplant for respiratory problems. The idea that my pension may be taken into account when considering this benefit and that I would reduce my pension contribution is utter nonsense. On the contrary, I would increase my contributions to accommodate my disability. I say that from my experience, as a person who fulfils the hypothetical case, and I am only one. The hon. Gentleman was trying to make a principle fit a hypothetical case, but I am a real case.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman speaks from experience, which I respect. Might I suggest, however, that he sacks his personal financial adviser? He should be putting his money into a vehicle that is not means tested by the Government—any form of saving other than a pension. As people realise that that is how the system works, it will create a distortion. Is that desirable?

Mr. Galbraith: As my friends know, I know absolutely nothing about money or finance. The Prime Minister said that he never considered me for a Treasury job, and that was probably a good idea.

So the point about my pension being taken into account when considering such a benefit must be nonsense. The idea that the contributory principle is inviolate and must never be touched is no longer true, although it may have been true in the early days of the welfare state.

Dr. Lynne Jones: I respect what my hon. Friend has told us from his experience and his proposals to deal with it. If he does not accept that means testing changes behaviour, I suggest that he reads the report of the social justice commission. It explains that means testing is not the way to ensure that people in need get the benefit they need.

Mr. Galbraith: That is another issue. We are discussing whether consideration should be given to other factors when making decisions on benefit. Let me knock on the head once and for all the idea that pensions should not be taken into consideration, and that if they are, people will reduce their contributions. Nothing could be further from the truth, so let me lay that ghost once and for all.

I have another area of expertise to bring to the debate. It has been said that the all work test, which involves medical criteria, should be used as a better policing gateway, and I agree with that. But the tests are not rocket science; they are not even purely objective. I have done many such tests and they are quite subjective. We must consider all the possible mechanisms, without regarding the doctors' criteria as the only or final ones.

Finally, I wish to deal with the issue of years without work. My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston gave some examples, but I can come at them from the opposite direction. Are people who worked for 10 years but not for the past 20 entitled to the benefit? According to my hon. Friend they are, according to me surely they are not. We have to make a judgment. Those are difficult calls to make and I agree that we do not always get them right.

It is not an exact science, but we have to make a judgment and set the dividing lines. We are confronted by dividing lines throughout our lives, and it is difficult for those who fall on the wrong side of them. It seems unfair because they are close to those who fall on the other side of the line. However, we have to make such judgments. I ask all hon. Members to consider that when they make their decisions tonight, and to not get lost in a fog of principle that does not apply.

I am grateful to the Government for their concessions on three years and the significant increase from £50 to £85, which is more than I expected. Therefore, I am happy to support the Government in the Lobby tonight.

6 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I shall speak briefly, because I suspect that Ministers are more likely to listen to the arguments—with which I agree—of Labour Members who oppose the Government's proposal than to those of Conservative Members.

Many of us find it astonishing that the Government's welfare reform proposals will cut the benefits of disabled people and widows. People who voted in a Labour Government at the last election did not suspect that those categories would be the target of the Government's welfare reform proposals. The Government spend more on social security than on health and education combined, but the increase in spending does not benefit those whom many people would consider to be the most deserving—the disabled and widows.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) set out our reasons for opposing the Government's so-called reform of incapacity benefit, in contrast to a few months ago when, in a similar debate, we supported the Government's measures on lone parent benefit. My hon. Friend pointed out that, when we introduced incapacity benefit in 1995, we considered means testing but rejected it because we believed it to be unfair. We continue to believe that.

We would all hate to retire before retirement age—some years hence for some of us, not so far away for others—and have to rely on incapacity benefit. Our future is part of the great lottery of life, but none of us wants that to happen. The insurance principle of making a contribution and benefiting from it is important and should be maintained in incapacity benefit.

With due deference to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), the Government's proposals will damage the principle of saving for a pension because those who make provision for themselves will be less eligible for state benefits. When I bang on doors in Bromsgrove, I am confronted by people who feel resentful because they have saved and receive little or nothing, while their neighbours, who did not make the same provision for themselves, receive all the state benefits. They represent a further tranche of seething resentment, which is felt by many whom the Government do not benefit. While I sympathise with the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden for what happened to him, Members of Parliament retire on considerably more than the £8,000 a year for which the Government are introducing a means test. That makes a great difference to our financial status in later life. It is different for those who retire on very little.

The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) quoted an article in *The Guardian*, which stated that the Government's welfare cuts made the poor pay for the very poor. That is true of the proposals that we are considering tonight. People who are forced, through disability, to retire early on a pension with many years of life—albeit disabled life—ahead will have their right to incapacity benefit truncated by the means test. That is unfair because they live on modest incomes, if the £8,000 a year trigger for the means test is correct. Even if the figure is a few thousand pounds out, it is a low income on which to retire for a long time.

Although we approve of the Government's promise not to raise the top rate of income tax, if I were a Labour Member, I would find it galling that relatively poor people are being made to pay for very poor people's benefits while the richer members of the community are not being asked to increase their contribution. That happens because the Government are increasing the social security bill. The reforms are unnecessary, as is increasing the social security budget. If I were a Labour Member, I would consider disgraceful the Government's method of introducing benefit cuts for some people.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Labour party fought the last election on the slogan, "Things can only get better". Does my hon. Friend agree that many disabled people, whose benefits will be removed, will be aghast at what is happening this evening? At the next election, disabled people, who have been so badly let down, will give Labour Members short shrift. Things can only get better unless one happens to be disabled.

Miss Kirkbride: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I shall underline it by telling the House about a telephone call that I received recently from a lady in Bromsgrove who worked for 30 years and is now on incapacity benefit. I was glad to be able to reassure her that the Government's iniquitous proposals will not affect her because they do not apply to existing claimants. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tell the truth."] Conservative Members tell the truth, unlike the Government.

Many other ladies and gentlemen will retire in the same condition as my constituent, who is obliged to sell her house because she can no longer afford to live there on her reduced income after being forced to retire on incapacity benefit. Others in her condition will find the Government's policies deeply offensive.

I am equally offended by Government proposals to cut entitlement to incapacity benefit for those who have contributed for only three years as opposed to a lifetime. I think of my constituents who suffer from multiple sclerosis and who are desperate to continue working but do not receive beta interferon despite promises that a new Labour Government would fund the drug and enable sufferers to work for longer. They will be offended by the Government's proposals. Their entitlement will be much reduced because the qualifying period will be only three years. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members can protest as much as they like, but that will happen.

Audrey Wise (Preston): I want to speak mainly about severe disablement allowance. I agree with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and of my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) about incapacity benefit. They made a good case.

Severe disablement allowance is under attack. That is a paradox, because the allowance was introduced under a different name by the last Labour Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that it was poorly targeted, but Barbara Castle described the target when she introduced the allowance. She said that the benefit

"will provide new, non-means-tested help for those of working age who are deprived of the opportunity to earn their living and who have no rights under existing contributory . . . schemes."

That was the target and it has been met. She described it as a brand new benefit and added:

"This is quite an historic moment. We have made an important breakthrough here."

She also referred to the fact that it would

"bring a new non-means-tested security to nearly 250,000 people whose needs we have neglected for far too long".—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1974; Vol. 881, c. 1555.]

Disabled people needed that benefit—it is now the severe disablement allowance—when it was introduced, and they still need it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that many of them are on income support despite receiving SDA. That is an argument for increasing SDA, not abolishing it. We have not even asked for an increase. Our aims have been so modest that we simply say, "Let's preserve it." However, as long as a benefit exists, there is the potential for increasing it, and as my right hon. Friend clearly recognises that the allowance is inadequate, he should go down that road—keep it and increase it. Barbara Castle was right—it was an historic moment. I am glad I was present in the House at the time. I am not glad to have to defend the allowance against this Labour Government now. In 1974, I would have been astonished had such a development been forecast.

Of course, I am glad that the Government are passporting those aged under 20, and sometimes under 25, on to incapacity benefit, which is worth more. We are all glad about that. However, that is no excuse for taking SDA away from the rest. My hon. Friends and I have tabled an amendment that would somewhat mitigate that action by increasing the categories of exemption. However, there is no realistic prospect of that amendment being called to a vote, and I have to admit that by far the simplest and best action would be to keep SDA for those over 20. That is exactly what Lords amendment No. 46 would achieve.

No case for abolition has been made. There has been much discussion about whether the Government's proposals will pay for improvements for others. I do not understand what the motivation is, and I am not imputing bad motives. However, I know that, if one increases benefits for some disabled people and decreases benefits for others, conclusions will be drawn. It is, in fact, a redistribution—whether it is intended to be so or not.

I believe very strongly that we who are able bodied and healthy should pay the whole cost of funding improvements for disabled people. I do not believe that there is any disabled person who is in too good a position in our country now, and that argument still applies even if savings are made and redistribution is carried out in the long term.

[Audrey Wise]

I do not want to put the cuts into an order of ranking. In some ways, however, the abolition of SDA is even worse than some of the other proposals. Certainly, the minority of people who are fortunate enough to be above the breadline should not have their benefits means tested. Those who at present qualify for the non-contributory benefit, SDA, and who have 80 per cent. long-term disablement should not be told that, if they are hard up, they might receive means-tested income support. That point was made in May when the Bill was before the House. Of course, married women with working husbands do not qualify for income support anyway, so their only independent income will be removed by the Bill. It might not be a good enough income, but it is their only independent income. One of the reasons for introducing the allowance was to give disabled people the dignity of an independent income by right.

6.15 pm

We are twitted that we shall be in the same Lobby as the Tories. As a Conservative Member helpfully pointed out, that applied on 10 December 1997 when the Government, the Leader of the Opposition and some Labour Members went into the same Lobby in the vote on lone parents. Some of us were in the other Lobby. Tonight, okay, our Lobby will be made impure by the presence of some Opposition Members. However, I remind hon. Friends, and especially the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), that we have some experience of that. He will remember that vividly, because it was quite an experience. My hon. Friend and I stood out alone—we did not receive the comfort of our hon. Friends—in a Finance Bill Committee against the massed weight of those on the Government Front Bench. Remember it was a very tight House and threats to bring down the Government perhaps carried more weight. However, we did not bring down the Government, but argued that we were improving the Chancellor's Budget—and the population agreed with us. Our proposal become mainstream, because no one could argue against increasing tax thresholds at least in line with inflation.

I commend to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State the words "at least". As my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr will tell him, if he does not already know, that was the phrase that we used to improve the position of taxpayers in 1977 and for many more years to come. After the issue received the exposure that we gave it, no Chancellor dared do other than raise the tax thresholds. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Rooker: Conservative Members may joke, but my hon. Friend and I have no regrets and do not need to apologise for any action that we took in Committee Room 9 on 14 June 1977. We intended to defeat the Government not just as a token and with a bleeding heart on our sleeve, but because the Government had flatly refused to move or listen at any time during our discussions with them. That does not apply to this Bill.

Audrey Wise: My hon. Friend has vindicated what some Labour Members did on 20 May this year. Would the Government have made any movement—even a minuscule one—had there not been 67 Labour Members in the Lobby? My hon. Friend is encouraging people to have the courage of their convictions, so that we can achieve more concessions. There is still time for more movement. As we have managed to obtain a slight advance for disabled people by what we have done so far, why not continue? Why do we not encourage the Government to do as my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston suggested and reach an accommodation with such well-known rebels as Jack Ashley, Alf Morris and Joel Barnett. Joel Barnett, for goodness sake, was one of the heavy mob against Jeff—I mean my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr—and me. The position is so clear that those noble Friends have taken the same view, and we have formed a very broad alliance that has been informed entirely by our concern for people with disabilities.

I encourage my right hon. and hon. Friends to join us in the Lobby and vote against the motion to disagree, because on this occasion the Lords amendment protects the interests of disabled people who are under attack. My hon. Friends should take courage from the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr and me. My hon. Friend says that he has no regrets; I certainly have none. We can do it. We can improve the Government's policies and we can live perfectly happily with a clear conscience ever after.

Mr. Swinney: I find it difficult to follow that speech, which was as stimulating as every other contribution that the hon. Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) makes to debates in which the House wrestles with difficult issues on welfare reform.

Many of the arguments that I intended to make were eloquently made by the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke). I shall focus on the arguments made by the hon. Member for Preston in relation to the Government's concessions and whether those concessions really have been—in the words of the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith)—generous and substantial.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) intervened on the Secretary of State to ask for firmer commitments in relation to the uprating of the £85 threshold for incapacity benefit, and for a commitment that, as a minimum, the threshold would be uprated to the year 2001 when the provisions come into effect, but ideally for a longer period. Understandably, the Secretary of State said that he was not in a position to commit other Governments to protecting that threshold. However, he could certainly have said that he could amend the Bill to provide for some indexation.

Countless measures that pass through the House provide for the indexation of specific figures on the face of a Bill. It is not a new measure that has been invented for the purposes of the debate, to cause discomfort to the Government, but an integral part of the way in which we legislate. As a minimum, the Secretary of State should have been able to give the right hon. Member for Swansea, West a more substantial answer, and to give a commitment that the Government would index that figure at least to 2001, and perhaps thereafter. That commitment was not there, so I suggest that the points made by the Government on what has been trumpeted as a major concession do not amount to much. The Government

could have gone further, and they could have advanced further toward the position that was arrived at in the other place.

The second concession on which I want to focus relates to the extension from two to three years that is implicit in the proposal announced by the Secretary of State the other day. In an intervention, I asked the Secretary of State why he had decided to move from two to three years, not from two to four years; why the period of two years was originally chosen; and why the period could not be extended from two to seven years, as envisaged in amendment (a), tabled by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry). The Secretary of State said that one just has to arrive at a position, and that no particular science is involved.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden said that there must be dividing lines. Of course there must, but if the Government were genuinely trying to bridge some of the gaps which have developed between them and the disability campaign organisations in this debate, they would have moved a great deal further to close the gap between the three years in their proposals and the seven years envisaged in the proposals from the House of Lords.

The hon. Member for Kingswood has tabled reasonable amendments to the Government's proposals—amendments on which the Government could have engaged in a better and more considered debate. As we have heard, the Government have arrived at a position that is not rooted in the history of this Labour Government—not rooted in the way in which the Government found and obtained their mandate from the people of the United Kingdom. It is a position that has been invented during the development of the Bill, and the development of a Government strategy that does not have its roots in the mandate that they sought from the United Kingdom electorate.

I said that I wanted to make a short speech on the substance of the concessions that the Government have made. The Government's proposals do not go nearly far enough to address the genuine concerns that exist in our community, so they should be rejected.

Mr. Levitt: Like many hon. Members, I believe that the debate has been of high quality. However, that has not been true of all the debate that has taken place outside the Chamber in the past few months. I am afraid that, in many cases, it has produced more heat than light.

For example, people in the country have been led to believe that, if they are now claiming benefits, there is a risk that they will lose them under the proposals in the Bill. That is not the case, although those fears have been cynically manipulated by Conservative Members who do not even have the decency to stay for the last few minutes of the debate.

Kali Mountford: More of them have just arrived.

Mr. Levitt: Indeed; there are as many Members on the Conservative Benches now as there have been at any time in the debate.

Outside this Chamber it has been said that the Bill is a "cuts" Bill—which it is not. Thankfully, no one has said that in tonight's debate, because, as has been said from time to time today, there may be changes to different budgets but the overall effect of the package, of which the incapacity element is only part, is to increase spending on people with disabilities in the years to come, to increase spending on welfare reform and, generally, to improve the lot of the worst-off, especially those with disabilities.

I believe that welfare reform, when looked at in its simplest form, should involve a debate about how we use the available resources to bring most help to the people who most need it. Of course we can talk about generating more help, and about having a bigger pot from which to draw—we shall do so, and we are doing so—but we have been led into a debate about the philosophy underlying the national insurance contribution system.

That debate has not been especially helpful. It has drawn attention to a great many difficulties, inconsistencies and anomalies in the national insurance contribution system. I was surprised but pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) alluded to some of the inconsistencies in that system.

I take one good example. As a result of the contributory system, some women whose income is too low have not qualified for maternity benefits. We put that right in the Bill and, by doing so, we flew in the face of the contributory system. We set that system to one side, by giving maternity benefits to women who would not previously have qualified. There has been no outrage about that.

Angela Eagle: The Conservatives voted against it.

Mr. Levitt: Indeed they did. Is that a sell-out of the national insurance contribution system?

In the past few months, the debate has become bogged down in such minutiae instead of encompassing all the Bill, which covers a range of Government policies.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman with increasing astonishment. Is he entirely unaware of the work of his right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)? Is he entirely unaware of the importance of trying to shift social security towards a system of contributions and away from a system of means testing?

Mr. Levitt: The contributory system accounts for only about 40 per cent. of the benefit system, and I am aware that there are varying views about how it should develop.

I want to say a quick word about some of the debate on incapacity benefit that has been taking place outside the House, because I believe that some of the issues are of interest only in the House, in the other place or to the higher echelons of some groups outside. Pressure groups exist to get the best that they can for their members. That is the job of the disability movement. That is the job of pressure groups. It is absolutely right that they should push the Government for more and more concessions in their interests, and they have won such concessions. But our job as a Government is different from that of pressure groups. Our job is to balance the needs of different groups and different individuals with the resources that are available to us, and to ensure that we target those resources, as we have done in the past week with the disabled person's tax credit, where they will give the most help—where they will be the most efficient in relieving poverty and improving welfare.

[Mr. Levitt]

On the occupational pension link with incapacity benefit and the clawback, incapacity benefit is, undeniably, not the principal disability benefit that people claim. From time to time, it has been said outside this place that disability benefits are under attack. Disability living allowance is the main disability benefit. It is not changing at all, except that there will be some improvements for people on DLA in relation to the rest of the system. We must therefore ask what is the purpose of incapacity benefit. It is to compensate, on a more or less flat rate, for the loss of income that is caused by having to leave the work force early owing to incapacity.

6.30 pm

Some people—increasing numbers over the years—have catered for such an eventuality by taking matters into their own hands and investing in occupational pensions. Some of them—a tiny number, I admit—receive occupational pension incomes that are higher than the salary of Back-Bench Members of Parliament. I do not begrudge them that. [HON. MEMBERS: "How many?"] It is a tiny number.

When we are guaranteeing to our pensioners a minimum income of £75 a week, to a disabled person in work a minimum income of £132 a week, to a person on the national minimum wage who works a 40-hour week a wage of £144 a week, and to a working family—by definition, a minimum of two people—an income of £200 a week, through the working families tax credit, why on earth should we top up with replacement benefits the incomes of single people who have no dependants and who receive incomes that are already in excess of £150 a week and, often, considerably more than that?

The minimum guaranteed income for a person with an occupational pension of £85 a week who receives £66.75 a week incapacity benefit is £151.75. That assumes that the person is on short-term incapacity benefit—it is bigger if he is on the long-term benefit—has no dependants and does not receive the age allowance. Let us consider how that compares to all other guaranteed incomes. It is the most generous of all.

I am not particularly worried about how many people have incomes of £20,000, £30,000 or more from occupational pensions and are claiming incapacity benefit, because it is not our job as a Labour Government to look after them when we are not guaranteeing the same income to people in the other groups that I have mentioned.

Mr. Berry: Would my hon. Friend remove all benefits from people on those incomes?

Mr. Levitt: We are talking about an income-replacement benefit. We have also mentioned the disability living allowance, which is not related to income. If such people qualified for DLA, they would get it.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My hon. Friend and I disagree about numbers. I have in my hand a letter from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which has been circulated to all hon. Members, which reminds us that only 2.3 per cent. of incapacity benefit recipients have an occupational pension of more than £200 a week. A tiny number of people receive these allegedly super-generous occupational pensions.

Mr. Levitt: That is the figure for now, not for the future. Also, we are guaranteeing to people with an occupational pension of £85 a week a top-up to a basic income of more than £150. We are talking not only about people who have an income of more than £200 or £300 a week, but about those who receive more than £150-odd a week, which is higher than the income which we guarantee to any other group in the population.

I remind the House that the proposed taper for occupational pensions in the Government's amendment is the second most generous in the entire benefits system. Housing benefit tapers at 65 per cent., working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit at 55 per cent., and jobseeker's allowance, and even the old-age pension, at 100 per cent.—one loses pound for pound on those. Only council tax benefit, which tapers at 20 per cent, is more generous.

Although I shall not ask now, because I am running short of time, I should like to know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) thinks that the 23 per cent. taper that he is advocating for incapacity benefit should be applied to all benefits. If so, has that proposal been costed, and would it be a justified use of resources in helping people who need such help most?

At a meeting on Monday night, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) asked what else would be lost if the Bill were to fall on the incapacity benefit issue. The answer is very simple: we would lose the highest rate of disability benefit ever paid to young people who have severe disabilities; DLA for three and four-year-old children; the stakeholder pension, with its protection for those on low pay and with broken contribution records; bereavement benefits for widows; maternity benefits for women on low pay; and the single gateway.

All those proposals are in the Bill, and if we play ping-pong with the Lords over the next few days on tiny issues surrounding the so-called principle of national insurance contributions and whether one supports the contributory system or thinks that there are alternatives—that is what we are talking about—we shall do a disservice to all those who would benefit.

The Government will win this vote and the issue will return to the Lords. I hope that that will be the end of the matter for now; however, there must be a constructive debate—in our party especially—about the role of the contributory system in benefits provision.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Member must address the Chair.

Mr. Levitt: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friends must accept that there are people such as me who are cynical about the value of the contributory system. Our views need to be heard as well.

I make a special plea to Lord Ashley—a man whom I have admired throughout my political life and who has generated in me a concern for deafness that has led to our sitting together as trustees of a major organisation that works in the interests of deaf people in this country.

Because of his position, and the respect for him in another place and in this one, he has the power to inflict considerable damage—perhaps even fatal damage—on the Bill.

If Lord Ashley did that, there would be a cost. There would be a cost to disabled people, who will genuinely benefit from the Bill; a cost to the political credibility of the Government whom both he and I support; and a cost to the entire legislative programme. If this Bill has to be reintroduced in its original form, and its passage in the next Session takes up the time that it occupied in this one, it will certainly impact on other issues on which the Government will be wanting to legislate.

It would be profoundly wrong to take this issue further and to play ping-pong with the other place. That will not achieve anything. We have aired the issues; there have been compromises and some progress on ensuring realistic levels relating to the contribution period and for occupational pension rules. I commend the Government's position to the House, and I hope that this is the last debate on the Bill in this Session.

Mr. Pickles: It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt), who served on the Committee that considered the Bill. I have great respect for his views, but to speak of the Parliament Act 1911 and ping-pong with the Lords, when we should be talking about disabled persons, is amazing. Frankly, I am not very impressed by the macho treatment of the other place. If the Government are prepared to listen, we shall be a long way away from such action. If they listen, ping-pong will not be necessary.

The hon. Member for High Peak is right that this has been a good debate of a high standard. I am thinking not least of the marvellous teaching of the hon. Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) that the best way in which an ambitious Back Bencher can become a Minister is to rebel, and of the Minister's dawning realisation that, after facing Lord Barnett after the 1977 rebellion, it is probably pay-back time.

One Labour Member said that he knew nothing about pensions or finance. That strikes me as a prerequisite for voting for the measure today. I am not impressed with the negotiations that seem to be taking place on the Floor of the House with regard to the other place, nor with the teachings about the Parliament Act, particularly as Ministers seem to be wrong.

We heard good speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) and for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride), who spoke of the experience of constituents. The hon. Members for St. Ives (Mr. George) and for Preston dealt with severe disablement allowance.

At the last Social Security questions, the Secretary of State produced a rather innocuous letter from me, which had been leaked to him. It seems that leaking occurs both ways, as I have received a copy of his briefing to Back Benchers. In response to the question why the Government are reforming severe disablement allowance, the answer given is that SDA is not targeted at the most severely disabled, but is a non-contributory version of incapacity benefit that is paid at a lower level. The briefing goes on to state that SDA is ineffective, and for 70 per cent. of recipients must be topped up with income support.

Severe disablement allowance is supposed to be non-contributory. It was designed specifically to meet the needs of housewives who, through no fault of their own, were unable to pay national insurance contributions. It was a unique benefit to be paid solely on the grounds of disability.

Audrey Wise: No.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Lady disagrees, but I believe that I am right. SDA was to be paid in cases of at least 80 per cent. disability. The Government have made a concession to allow young people with no chance of employment and no prospect of paying national insurance contributions to receive it.

Audrey Wise: I intervene in the interests of accuracy. The hon. Gentleman is wrong when he suggests that the primary target of SDA was housewives. Initially, it was made more difficult for housewives than for men and single women to receive SDA. It affected everyone. After a bit of push, the benefit was extended to housewives on an equal basis. Recipients would qualify without a means test.

6.45 pm

Mr. Pickles: I stand corrected, but I was paraphrasing Lord Ashley, who made the point in another place.

The Government tell us that to pay for the concession to young people, SDA must be abolished. They propose to take away from one disabled group to give to another disabled group. They will remove one inequality by creating another.

In another place, the Minister, Lady Hollis, said:

"I believe that that is the right focusing of the benefit—not continuing to give it to people who have chosen not to build up a contributory record, as in the case of some married women, or who would not need access to means-tested benefits because they have sufficient finances coming into the household."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 October 1999; Vol. 605, c. 461.]

The principal losers will be women. There are 2.4 million women who earn less than the national insurance threshold and cannot build up contributions. Lord Morris said in another place that the proposal represented not so much the reform of the benefit system as an attempt to put the clock back. He gave a number of moving examples to show how people would be affected.

I raised the matter with the Secretary of State. A disabled person who has £8,000-worth of capital or £3,000-worth of savings or a spouse who is earning will receive nothing, yet the purpose of the measure was to give disabled people some financial independence. When the point was put to the Secretary of State, all that he could do was bluster.

The Government's argument is that everyone above income support level is well off and should not receive SDA. The suggestion is that people with savings of more than £3,000 or capital of £8,000 or a spouse in employment should not receive it. If a wife who has taken time off to look after children becomes disabled during that period, she will receive nothing under the Government's proposals.

The Government say that if people do not make contributions, they are not entitled to receive benefit, yet the Government also say that if people make

[Mr. Pickles]

contributions, they are not entitled to benefit. The Government are predetermining according to their whim the level of benefit that people should receive.

The Secretary of State told us this afternoon that he intended to ensure that the Tories would be prevented from cutting social security benefit. There was a time not long ago, before the general election, when it was the proud boast of the Labour party that the Tories would cut benefits. In a few moments the House will be asked to vote on a measure that the Tory party considered too harsh. If that is new Labour, good luck to it.

Mr. Rooker: It is traditional to say that we have had an interesting debate. We have, but it has not been entirely accurate.

For obvious reasons, the detailed history of the Bill is much better known to many of my hon. Friends than it is to me. However, as I made clear earlier, this is not the Bill that was originally introduced or which left the House after Third Reading, and the Government are entitled to take some credit for that. There has hardly been a period when the Government have not been listening. Colleagues on both sides of the House could claim that we have not listened enough to meet all their demands, but no one will be able to vote against the Government tonight and claim that we have not listened. That would simply not be true.

I shall repeat another point, now that the hare is running. It ran for me first on Monday evening, secondly on the letters page of *The Guardian* today, and thirdly with one of my hon. Friends today when the issue of the retirement pension was raised. I repeat without apology that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it unambiguously clear at Question Time today that the retirement pension is not in anyone's sights. It is not an intellectually honest argument to say that the changes in incapacity benefit are the thin end of the wedge, and that the retirement pension will be next in line.

There is no possibility of that happening under a Labour Government, irrespective of who the Prime Minister is. It is not part of our agenda, and we have made that clear. To set that hare running causes untold worry and unnecessary concern to those outside the House who watch or listen to our proceedings. To make claims that everyone knows are not true adds nothing to the argument about welfare reform. That point must be made again on the record.

There has been constant reference to cuts in benefit. It must be repeated that no cuts in benefit are planned. When hon. Members face the electorate, whatever arguments they may have in respect of future changes, the people whom they meet will be on the same benefit or will receive more under the Bill. That is the reality. As my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) said when he read out the list of measures in the Bill, there will be extra money for many people. That is at risk if the Bill falls. It is not true to say that the Bill is only about changes to incapacity benefit and that that is where the concentration is.

I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends that nobody needs to apologise for raising these important issues. No one can gainsay the fact that there was concern in the original debates; we are not saying that there was not. That is proved by the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear at the time—I was not in this Department, but I was in the House—that he would listen, take the matter away and rethink some points in the Bill. That is what happened during the parliamentary recess, and the same is true of the debates in the other place.

Therefore, it is wholly reasonable for us to say that we have made changes. Some of my hon. Friends might say that they are not enough and that there is no rigid formula for how we arrived at the figure of £85. That is true; there is no formula because it was not possible to use one. There was an original figure of £50, which is not in the Bill, and I understand that there were demands for it to be £105. We looked at the good trade union principle of splitting the difference, but £75 was not enough because it did not protect enough people. That is why we went to £85; it is as simple as that. There is no magic formula. We looked at all the issues and decided that with £85 being as near as dammit to the average occupational pension received by someone on incapacity benefit, more people would gain than under the median figure of £75. In order to reinforce that, we have put the figure in the Bill.

I will not be able to respond to all the detailed points raised in the debate, but I ought to try to respond to some of them, if only for the sake of accuracy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), in an interesting and powerful speech, talked about people with intermittent illness. If what he said was true, we would have cause for concern, but it is not. I want to put this on the record. Since last October—I remind my hon. Friends that there was a Labour Government then—when we extended the linking rules for incapacity benefit from eight to 52 weeks, disabled people have been assured that they can try for work for periods of up to one year with a guarantee of being able to return to the same level of benefit should they fall ill again. The same rules also mean that they will be able to meet the new contribution test. For people who receive the new disabled persons tax credit, the linking period is extended to two years. Rather than making it harder for people to try for work, we are making it easier.

For those not covered by the linking rules, we are making general provision for people to requalify without paying further national insurance contributions if they were on incapacity benefit in the last tax year. Nobody has to be continuously in work to qualify for IB. Someone on the minimum wage would pay the necessary contributions in 12 weeks, and on average earnings, four weeks would be enough. Someone in the circumstances described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston would not be covered by the changes in the Bill. Such a person would still be protected.

During the first 20 minutes of this debate there was only one Conservative Member on the Back Benches and I see that the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) has not returned to his seat. However, he did raise a point that has been laboured by many others. He talked about people who have made contributions for 30 years missing one year and being unable to claim. So many myths have built up over the years about the national insurance system that we have all come to believe them. We believe that it is a piggy bank, that there is a personal fund and that if stamps are paid over a number of years, there is entitlement to benefit. That has never been the case. Contributions or credits have been required in both the last two tax years for people to be able to qualify.

no matter how many years they have paid. If they do not have those contributions or credits from the last two tax years, they fail to qualify for incapacity benefit. The Bill does not change that. The Bill puts a time limit on the use of credits when someone is unemployed because they have pulled out of the job market completely and claimed their occupational pension.

There was a letter in one of the newspapers today asking what would be the incentive for people in such a position to go on retraining programmes or to get back into work. It looks for all the world as if we are talking about people who are not in receipt of an occupational pension. We are talking about people who have withdrawn from the labour market under the retirement age for their own reasons. The myth that that includes all disabled people is nonsense. The hare gets out and starts to run simply because of a misunderstanding about the national insurance rules. There is nothing new about this.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) said that some people believe that SDA will be taken away through the all work test. The existing SDA recipient will be receiving the allowance on the basis of being 80 per cent. disabled. Those who are 80 per cent. disabled are exempt from the all work test. These myths are suggested in letters from pressure groups with a legitimate axe to grind because they are in the business of getting more for a particular client group. Hon. Members come to the House and repeat those myths to strengthen their argument, without checking whether they are true. That devalues their contribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) made a contribution, but I do not have time to go into it now, except to say that, in 1977, the Government had not listened and were not intending to listen. There were no procedures for listening and my hon. Friend knows that because we both met my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton- under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and Lord Barnett at the Treasury. The junior Whip on that Finance Bill is now the Chief Whip and she is well aware of the fact that the Government were not moving. This Government have moved.

It is true that no one political party owns the Lobbies in this place. There is not a Lobby for the Labour party and a Lobby for the Tory party. I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends however, that they cannot go into the Lobby to vote against the Government saying that the Government have not listened. That is not true. The Government have moved. If my right hon. and hon. Friends do not want to support the Government, I hope that they will think twice before voting against. That would send the wrong signals to the other place and it is important to take that into account given the time limits under which we are operating. If a sufficient number of hon. Members vote against the Government, the other place might start playing ping-pong. There is no doubt that the Bill is under threat. That is not an idle point.

If the Bill is lost, all the good points, which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak, will be lost. I stand by what I said about the Parliament Act. Confusing the Parliament Act with carry-over motions might be a common occurrence, but I will not do it because I know the rules we used for the War Crimes Bill.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rooker: No; the hon. Gentleman should not be stupid, I am not giving way with two minutes to go. We are on a guillotine.

The loss of the Bill would be highly damaging to the Government, to future pensioners, and to 5 million people currently at work who have no second pension provision and who are earning modest incomes of between £9,000 and £20,000 a year. We want to get them into a pension fund as quickly as possible under the stakeholder pension scheme. These measures cannot be brought back at a stroke and within a few short weeks because this House and the other place do not work like that.

The debates have been interesting, but I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will ask themselves whether, to their certain knowledge, everything that has been said is 100 per cent. accurate. They will know that, in Committee, on Report and here today, not all arguments adduced against the Government have been based on the facts of the Bill. We are making laws for our constituents, and we must get them right.

The Government are entitled to ask hon. Members to judge us on what is in the Bill, not on what they want to be in the Bill, what they think is in the Bill, or what they have been told is in the Bill by someone outside with an axe to grind. The Bill provides massive increases for hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens. It does not cut a single benefit from anyone currently receiving benefit. It is simply not true that it is based on cuts. It is based on reform, and I ask my hon. Friends to support the Government.

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order this day.*

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 325, Noes 265.

Division No. 282] **[7 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger

Caweey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
(Makerfield)
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine
(Morecambe & Lunesdale)
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony

Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dobbin, Jim
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Flight, Howard
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Ilsley, Eric
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Jeuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Keith Simpson and
Mr. Oliver Heald.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendments (c) and (d) to the words so restored to the Bill agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 43, to leave out clause 58.

7.15 pm

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 262.

Division No. 283] **[7.16 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dobbin, Jim
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Flight, Howard
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Ilsley, Eric
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
[illegible]tosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Warsing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David

Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Keith Simpson and
Mr. Oliver Heald.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendments (c), (d) and (e) to the words so restored to the Bill agreed to.

Lords amendments 44 and 45 agreed to [one with Special Entry].

Lords amendment: No. 46, to leave out clause 60.

7.30 pm

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 326, Noes 253.

Division No. 284] **[7.30 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berrningham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*

Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dobbin, Jim
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Flight, Howard
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*

Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Keith Simpson and
Mr. Oliver Heald.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Before Clause 1

ADDITIONAL PENSION

Lords amendment: No. 1, to insert the following new clause—

("PART ZI

ADDITIONAL PENSION

ADDITIONAL PENSION FOR WIDOWS OR WIDOWERS

(".—(1) The Secretary to State shall by regulations make provision for one or more of the following—

(a) to substitute, in any provision of the Contributions and Benefits Act which relates to additional pension for widows or widowers, for any sum payable by way of such pension as is derived from the contributions of a deceased spouse, such higher sum as may be prescribed;

(b) to substitute, in any such provision, for any prescribed reference to the year 2000, a reference to such later year as may be prescribed;

(c) to establish a scheme to compensate persons who are widowed after 5th April 2000 and who suffered loss as a result of any action or failure to act in reliance on incorrect information received from a Government department with respect to the reduction in the additional pension payable to them as a result of the enactment of the former section 19 of the Social Security Act 1986.

(2) If regulations under subsection (1) are not in force on 5th April 2000, then until such time as such regulations are in force, the provisions of the Contributions and Benefits Act to which paragraph (a) of that subsection apply shall continue to have effect as in force on that date.

(3) No regulations shall be made under subsection (1) unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.")

Mr. Rooker: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the Government amendment in lieu thereof, amendment (a) to the amendment in lieu thereof, and the consequential Government amendment.

Mr. Rooker: This part of the Bill deals with inherited SERPS and the mis-selling by the previous Government of the changes to the scheme that were legislated for many years ago.

In 1986 the previous Government made substantial changes to the state earnings-related pension scheme and gave a considerable period of notice before the change was to be made—it is due in April next year. That notice was intended to allow people who might be affected plenty of time to alter their financial arrangements. The then Government promised wide publicity, but it was never delivered.

As in other cases, Ministers in the present Government are not allowed to see the papers of the previous Government, but I would give my right arm—metaphorically and politically—to see those papers, because they must have had some discussions about deliberately—

Mr. Pickles *rose—*

Mr. Rooker: I have not made the allegation yet, but I shall give way.

Mr. Pickles: Perhaps I can anticipate the Minister. Why was the Benefits Agency still giving out duff information on 14 April this year?

Mr. Rooker: I shall come to that. I am simply saying that there must have been a policy of not carrying through the promised publicity campaign. On 25 February 1986, the then Minister of State, Department of Social Security, our former colleague Tony Newton, now in the other place, said:

"We have every intention of mounting a major publicity campaign to herald the pension changes contained in the present Bill, should it become an Act, as we expect that it will."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 25 February 1986; c. 451.]

Two days later, on 27 February 1986, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, our colleague the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), said:

"The provision diminishing the amount of SERPS which may be inherited from the year 2000 by a surviving spouse to half of the deceased's entitlement instead of, as at present, the whole sum, corrects what has widely been felt as an over-generous provision indeed. I point out to the hon. Lady that because of the projected position that exists until the year 2000, people will have plenty of time and ample warning. There will be no sudden, overnight, dramatic change in their position and they will have plenty of time in which to seek to make major alternative provision for survivors if they wish."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 27 February 1986; c. 463.]

The previous Government were legislating well in advance, in 1986. Similarly, changes to the retirement age for men and women over 10 years will be phased in from 2010 to 2020. It was right to give plenty of warning, but people have to be told.

7.45 pm

We cannot hide behind the fact that we live in a parliamentary democracy and say that no decisions here are made behind closed doors and people should take account of what happens in Parliament. The press stopped reporting what happens here years ago. There was no great beanfeast over the change. It is regretted that no publicity campaign ever took place, to the extent that, as the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) rightly said, earlier this year the Benefits Agency was still giving out incorrect information. The Government have a responsibility to put right the difficulties. We are responsible for only part of the delay. We could have done it in the first year, but we did not. We could have done it in the second year, but we did not. We are certainly dealing with it before our third anniversary.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): Have the Government commissioned an audit to ascertain whether there are any other changes to regulations or legislation that have not been publicised which could cause similar problems?

Mr. Rooker: I understand that Ministers did that long before I arrived at the Department. It is a frequent problem. At the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food I found little matters hidden away that had been decided a long time ago but which suddenly came up and bit my ankles without warning. We are not aware of anything else in the Department remotely on the scale of this problem. I shall make clear the amounts of money involved.

I admit that wrong information was still being given out at the beginning of this year, but as soon as we knew, we took immediate steps to ensure that Benefits Agency staff were able to provide correct advice. We have made a full check on the accuracy of all our leaflets. When I go to benefit offices—I have not done so as often as I would like in the past few weeks, but I have been to a few, not all in my region—I make a point of looking at the leaflets on display to ensure that information on the age change for retirement, particularly as it affects women, is on display.

The Government have been pressed at every stage of the Bill to resolve the issue from next year. Preventing the problem in April 2000 requires a change in primary legislation. This is our opportunity. Individuals who have acted to their detriment as a result of bad advice would have a reasonable case for redress in the courts. Some hon. Members have complained to the Parliamentary Commissioner about the issue. I have answered many letters from Members of Parliament about it during my three months at the Department. I do not remember anyone raising the case with me as a constituency Member, so I have not had to write a letter to myself—but that day may come.

Large numbers of people who could be affected are already pensioners. We do not want to leave them with the worry of seeking legal redress. That would not be good government anyway. A range of solutions have been suggested during the passage of the Bill. The scale of the likely cost is well known. We have answered parliamentary questions on that. One option put to us was to delay the whole thing for 10 years. That would cost about £5.5 billion, plus about £1 billion a year for some time following that, because it would not get us out of the whole difficulty. That burden would be borne by today's contributors because of the nature of SERPS.

We have explored all the options thoroughly. During my 13 weeks at the Department I have been involved in more meetings and discussions on this issue than on any other single subject. That is partly because of the timetable that we are up against. We have tried to find a precise solution to put in the Bill. We have not been able to do that, for reasons that I shall explain. That is why we have the amendment.

We do not intend to overturn the policy by changing legislation retrospectively. Before anyone reminds me, I know that we opposed the change at the time, but it is not sensible to get into that debate. Millions of people out there are worried about changes in SERPS and what is coming next April, and we need to reassure them.

The change will bring the state provision clearly into line with private pension schemes. In the Green Paper last year, we made clear that we wanted to reverse the current position, in which 60 per cent. of spending on pensions is state expenditure and 40 per cent. is private. It is our long-term policy to reverse that over 50 years. We cannot do that by sitting back and waiting for things to happen.

The policy simplifies one element of people's decision about which pension option to choose. However, dealing with the mess we have been landed with is not straightforward, and we do not want to announce a decision until we are absolutely sure. We will make an announcement as soon as possible. I cannot say when, but by implication, before next April would be our intention.

The amendment says that if we have not come up with a solution of either a delay or a protected rights scheme, the trigger is in the Bill to stop the change occurring next April, so that the situation will not arise.

Mr. Pickles: The Minister is being most reasonable, and I am not saying this to be difficult. However, the Minister's noble Friend Baroness Hollis said that the Government would make an announcement before the end of deliberations. Also—and with great respect—I must remind the Minister that he said two weeks ago that the Government would come to a decision within three weeks. He is now saying that this has slipped, perhaps until April. Could he tell us why?

Mr. Rooker: In effect, we are making an announcement with the publication of the amendment. That is not the solution, but it gives us two options. We have not yet come to a conclusion. I realise that the hon. Gentleman is quoting Baroness Hollis, and we are amending Lord Rix's amendment. I pay tribute to Lord Rix for his work and his contribution to the debates in the other place. We owe him our thanks for providing us with a legislative way forward—albeit one that does not provide a solution.

The amendment provides the power to introduce regulations and will allow the Government to do one or more of the following: to vary the percentage rate of

[Mr. Rooker]

inherited SERPS for some or all of the widows and widowers; to postpone the change to 50 per cent. to a specified later date, and I have given an example of the cost if that were to be in 10 years' time; or to run a protected rights scheme. If none of those powers is exercised, the clause will ensure that the 100 per cent. inheritance of SERPS continues to apply after April 2000 until regulations are in force.

It would be untenable to leave people in a situation where regulations could come in overnight, without warning, and we will give a reasonable warning of changes. It would not be in the spirit of good government to say, "In six months' time, there will be new rules." Whatever we do will have to be phased in. If it is a protected rights scheme, it will take a lot of careful planning to ensure that the millions of potential beneficiaries can be dealt with individually, as citizens. We cannot do this on the back of an envelope.

We have lost a decade or more since the legislation was put on the statute book, but it will not be that long again if the amendment and the Bill are passed tonight. The regulations will be subject to the affirmative procedure, and both Houses will have ample opportunity to debate the changes. That may be on the Floor, in Committee or even in the new Chamber.

As Ministers, we will not shy away from explaining the way forward that we choose, as potentially 30 million people—those who have paid national insurance, existing pensioners and people who will not retire for 10 years or so—are involved. Not all of them will be able to claim that they were mis-sold pensions, but that is not the issue. We are dealing with our fellow citizens, and we must be as open as possible.

Mr. Burstow: The Minister is being constructive, and it would be helpful if he could give the House more details. Does he envisage making an announcement before or after the work of the ombudsman?

Mr. Rooker: I cannot give an answer to that. The matter was referred to the Parliamentary Commissioner by right hon. and hon. Members, and we are co-operating. The amendment contains a lot of detail and once we have decided, we will come back and report to the House.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): My hon. Friend is being frank and fair, and all of us accept the Government's real difficulties. Could he indicate whether in whatever scheme he comes up with any route that will require claims for compensation to be made on an individual basis will be as limited as possible?

Mr. Rooker: I am not sure that I caught the thrust of my hon. Friend's question. If we have a protected rights scheme, we will want to ensure that everyone with a rightful claim is able to make it. There will be issues about eligibility, but millions of people who are currently still working might have a say, as might current pensioners.

The handling of this matter in the past was unfortunate and I appreciate the distress that has been caused. I appreciate also the massive media attention, which has come a bit late in the day. If the media had reported the changes over the years, we would not be in this position today. *[Interruption.]* That is a legitimate point.

We do not require our proceedings to be reported. We know that, years ago, the press and media generally—the BBC included—decided to stop reporting proceedings in this House. Most of those involved—who were probably contracted out, in well-heeled occupational schemes, which is fine—were not bothered about SERPS and national insurance. "That's for the workers," they said. "We are not reporting that."

I am aware, too, that the Liberal Democrats tabled amendments to our new proposal to provide for a 10-year delay. I have set out the cost of that, and such a delay would not catch everyone who may be involved. It catches a large number, of course, but one might need to go beyond 10 years. That is why it has been difficult to arrive at a decision. Whatever we do will have a possible cost of billions of pounds—money that is not planned for in terms of public expenditure, and which must be found by today's taxpayers and today's national insurance contributors.

I therefore hope that the House will give fair wind to the Government amendment in lieu of the Lords amendment.

8 pm

Mr. Pickles: The Minister made a reasoned speech and we will certainly support the Government's amendment in lieu. I recognise the problems involved in finding an ideal solution. The Liberal Democrats' amendment (a) to the Government's amendment in lieu has the potential to cause injustice and fail to catch all the people we would want to catch, and I hope that they will not press it to a vote, because we should give the Government a chance to come up with a final solution, to use the Minister's phrase.

There was a small element of partisanship in what the Minister said. It is about time that someone, from whichever Dispatch Box, said sorry. Some people should accept responsibility for what happened, because there has been considerable injustice. I said in Committee that I accept my share of responsibility.

It matters not a jot that I was chairman of Bradford education committee at the time when the measure went through. We are all responsible, because we clearly came to a view in 1986 that would have a fundamental effect on people's eventual pension, and nothing happened. It is too easy to shrug off that responsibility. Ultimately, such decisions are for the Chamber. It is our job to ensure that Departments do not simply ignore the legislation that we pass.

The Minister was very fair in saying that the Government now accept what they opposed in opposition. It is right to get the provisions into line with occupational pensions. We cannot go back to the position that provisionally exists now. We should ensure that the scheme is generally accepted. It is right to allow considerable time for people to make appropriate decisions according to their needs.

Unfortunately, we completely wasted 16 years. There was no publicity campaign. The present Leader of the House said at the time:

"If the Government are going to release ample publicity warning people that their pensions and the widows' pensions will be halved, not only will we welcome it, but we shall help the Minister to distribute it."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 27 February 1986; c. 471.]

That is all very fine, although no one would have expected Labour Opposition Members, or indeed Ministers, to go out on the streets to hand out leaflets; one might reasonably have expected the Department to do it, though.

We have done people a great injustice. People wrote to and telephoned the Benefits Agency and its predecessor for advice and made investment decisions on the basis of the wrong advice that they were given. In Committee, we considered the way in which people contacted the agency. There is a record of the letters but not of the telephone calls. The Minister's predecessor made considerable progress on the quality of proof that people acted on wrong information. What is the Government's current thinking on that?

I learned in Committee that on the very day in January on which a memo was sent out to instruct Benefits Agency officers how to deal with the problem, the agency issued a letter giving an incorrect figure to a member of the public. In that memo, which the Minister supplied to me, no reference was made to sending out corrections to incorrect information. I hope that he will bear that in mind before he talks about mis-selling in future.

I am glad that the Minister has done an audit, but there is still a muddle. It has been suggested that the first indication of when changes were made was in February 1996, but my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has discovered that that is not so. Some people collect first editions of interesting works and he collects Benefits Agency guides from previous years. That probably says something about my boss.

The agency's information guide of May 1995, on page 221, says:

"Changes to SERPS . . .

Widows and widowers over 65 will be able to inherit up to half their partner's SERPS pension, instead of the full amount. This particular change will not happen until the year 2000."

That was on the desk of everybody who worked for the agency.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Will my hon. Friend comment on the contrast between those in the private sector who failed to know and implement the rules correctly and who are being fined and often driven out of business, and those in the public sector who have done the same thing and for whom there seems to be no penalty whatever?

Mr. Pickles: That is a valid point. My hon. Friend was the first to elicit the original date, in a question to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and here we have something dated a year earlier. The guide was on every desk in the Benefits Agency in 1995, yet agency staff paid not a jot or tittle of attention to it, even when it was all over the newspapers. That is deeply worrying.

I hope that the Minister will come up with a solution. He was not quite right to say that the Government amendment in lieu honours the promise made by Lady Hollis, because it is essentially Lord Rix's amendment with a few bells on. I am willing to give the Minister the benefit of the doubt, to give him time and to promise him our co-operation, but I hope that we will have a known and agreed solution to this very difficult problem before April 2000.

Mr. Burstow: I echo the final point made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). We must find the right solution to the issue of misinformation on inheritance rights in respect of SERPS, even if that takes a bit of time, and I warmly welcome the Minister's constructive approach in explaining what the Government are doing to try to resolve a problem that they inherited and that they wish they could halve now, rather than facing the possibility of people's entitlements being halved.

When the other place debated the failure to publicise the 1986 changes that halved widows' entitlement to inherit SERPS pensions after April next year, Earl Russell made a telling point. He said that the issue was not necessarily a question of a failing of a political party—although I can understand why the Minister would wish to suggest that—but of the failure of government as an organisation to deliver. We will not know if that carries political overtones for many years to come, until the papers are revealed and some interested journalist digs out the necessary details of incompetence or whatever it was.

It is important to deal with the practicalities of how we move on from the current position. There has been a fundamental breakdown in communications between the policy part of the Department of Social Security and its implementation part on this issue. That is why I asked the Minister in an intervention a few moments ago whether similar breakdowns have occurred in other aspects of legislation in the past or since 1986.

It is clear that, as a consequence of that fundamental breakdown, the relevant advice leaflets were not properly updated, despite the references that have been made to the handbook this evening. Many of the basic advice leaflets available in Benefits Agency offices were not updated for 10 years. Many hon. Members have received correspondence from constituents who feel aggrieved by the situation, and I have passed on several examples from my constituency. Incorrect advice was provided in correspondence, on the telephone and over the counter at Benefits Agency offices. As we have heard already, even in April this year after the issue was well publicised, the public were still being given incorrect information and being misinformed about their entitlement.

I pay tribute to the work that has been done by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) to raise the profile of the issue and to reach a solution. Over the past year, he has written three times on the issue of compensation and he has been instrumental in approaching the Parliamentary Commissioner to begin the investigation into whether the Department of Social Security is guilty of maladministration. Together with a representative from *The Sun*—I cannot think of a more unusual alliance—my hon. Friend also presented a petition to No. 10 to highlight the concerns on the issue.

So far we have had many announcements that there will be an announcement. The Minister moved further tonight by adding some more bells and whistles to the amendment passed in the Lords, but we still do not have a definitive

[Mr. Burstow]

announcement. I speak for many of my constituents and others who feel that the sooner a concrete set of recommendations and proposals is in the public domain, so that everyone knows where they stand, the better.

When the scandal of private pension mis-selling came to light, the Government were right to insist that companies paid compensation and wrote to everyone who might be affected. That has not happened in this case and it is a shame that the Government did not apply to themselves the same rules that applied to the private sector. If they had, we would not be debating the issue again this evening. If action had already been taken, hundreds of people who have been, or who expect to be, affected by the changes would not be agonising about how they can afford to replace the income that their wives stand to lose.

In Committee, my hon. Friends tabled amendments that set out three options to try to address the issue. The first was that widows should continue to receive the full SERPS entitlement after April 2000. The second was that a gradual reduction should be phased in—for example, a 10 per cent. reduction could be made each year over five years, to try to ease the transition. The third option was a postponement to 2010.

Lords amendment No. 1 was tabled by Lord Rix to try to sort out the mess. It attempted to incorporate the various options that had been put forward in this House and in the other place. It was welcome news for many outside Parliament that the Government accepted the amendment as a first step, and tonight we have a longer and more detailed amendment from the Government that puts more flesh on the bones by spelling out the matters on which the Secretary of State may prescribe regulations for a compensation scheme. It was interesting to read the Government's amendment, because it gives much more detail about the process of a compensation scheme and I wonder whether we can take clues about the Government's thinking from the amendment. Have they decided that it is the way ahead? If the Minister could confirm that, it would be both helpful and informative.

8.15 pm

The Government have already said that any compensation scheme would need to take account of misleading written communications and also advice given by telephone. That was accepted in an exchange in the House on 24 June, during a Supply-day debate initiated by the Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrat amendment would provide a minimum period of 10 years for any delay in implementing the SERPS reduction. If the Government opt for the postponement option to solve the problem, 10 years would offer people a reasonable time—we have already debated the meaning of the word reasonable tonight—to make other arrangements.

The House originally intended, when it debated the issue in 1986, to give people 14 years' notice of the changes, but people will have had just four years' notice since the Benefits Agency woke up to the fact that it had failed to amend its leaflets. Therefore, it seems only fair to give people the 10 years' notice that they never had. The gross cost of a 10-year postponement, according to a recent written answer, would be £60 million in the first year, with a peak of £1.16 billion in 2010. The Minister also gave a net cost figure of some £5 billion.

Another written answer revealed that the projected surpluses on the national insurance fund for each of the next three years are between £1.4 billion and £1.6 billion. In other words, the money to pay for a postponement is available in the national insurance fund and, therefore, a postponement of 10 years is affordable. It has been speculated that the Government are considering a five-year postponement, but such a short delay would leave the Government open to further claims for compensation through the courts.

Our amendment seeks to rule out any postponement for less than 10 years, because that would assist the Government by reducing the likely numbers of compensation claims and the consequential administration costs of any compensation scheme that would still be necessary, and would perhaps give greater certainty to those many people who are concerned about their SERPS entitlement in the future. The clock is ticking and we have only six months until the April deadline when the changes would have been introduced. The Government amendment puts that on hold until they can come up with a scheme, but it is never satisfactory to leave something in limbo and that is especially true of people's pension provision. I hope that the Government will give people information at the earliest opportunity so that their minds can be put at rest.

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): It is refreshing to have such an honest and forthright Minister fronting such a difficult debate. My hon. Friend has been straight with the House and we should give him credit for that. It is also refreshing to have a Government who are prepared to hold up their hands and accept responsibility, even though the mistake was made by their predecessors. There are two types of responsibility—responsibility for the mistake, and responsibility to the people affected by it. The Government accept that it has the latter type of responsibility.

It is absolutely necessary to introduce some corrective measure to overcome the fiasco facing us in connection with SERPS. SERPS is not quite the same as the national insurance contributions scheme. Because it is an insurance against possible illness or incapacity that can occur at any time, payments into the NIC scheme can be redeemed at any time. People who are lucky do not need them, and I have always been very fortunate in that I have never had to redeem much of my national insurance contributions.

SERPS is more akin to an annuity or an endowment. Under that scheme, extra payments are made that are intended to be redeemed on retirement or at the death of a spouse. Alternative annuity and endowment schemes are available in the market, of which the people affected by the proposal might have preferred to take advantage.

The enormous amount of work that has gone into the new clause seems to point the way towards a possible compensation scheme. My hon. Friend the Minister honestly believes that a compensation scheme is better than deferment, mainly on grounds of cost. He gave the gross figures to prove it, although out of those gross figures can be taken tax payments incurred as people's

income rises above tax thresholds, and also the benefits that people forfeit as their income rises as a result of SERPS.

My hon. Friend also said that a scheme of deferment, although it would catch a lot of people, would not be perfect and would therefore not be fair. However, would a scheme of compensation be perfect or fair? I suggest that it would not, and that it would be expensive. No figures have been given, but I would guess that administering a scheme such as that foreshadowed in the new clause would be horrendously expensive.

A scheme of compensation would open up a can of worms. People who received incorrect advice would have to be distinguished from people who did not seek advice in the first place. People who did not seek advice may have thought that they already knew the rules: they may have seen how the system worked for their brothers and sisters and for the friends with whom they have grown old, and decided that they did not need to seek advice. Would it be fair to distinguish between those who did not seek advice and those who did not think that they needed it?

A problem remains even when people seek advice. The question would arise whether that advice was given in writing, or by telephone. How does one prove that advice was given by telephone? A telephone call cannot be photocopied or put in an envelope. The problems would be horrendous.

Anyone with a good lawyer and accountant would be able to cope with such a compensation scheme, but we must be realistic: we are talking about people who do not employ lawyers and accountants. My hon. Friend himself said that we are talking about the millions, rather than the privileged few. They will not be able to find their way around a scheme that demands that they be well versed in matters of finance.

It would be impossible for a scheme of compensation to operate fairly and adequately. If one can say that about a scheme of deferment, one can say it with knobs on about a scheme of compensation. It would also be horrendously expensive to operate, with most of the money going on administration instead of to claimants. The advantages of a scheme of compensation, in terms of cost to the Treasury, could only accrue as a result of massive lack of take-up. If ever a scheme were designed for massive non-take-up it would be a scheme of compensation for a mess such as the one that the Government have inherited.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, given what happened with the mis-selling of private pensions, the introduction of a compensation scheme such as has been described would leave the Government morally bound to write to everyone who could possibly be affected to advise them that they might be eligible for compensation? In that case, the Government might not be able to restrict the numbers of people who took it up.

Mr. O'Hara: That is a helpful remark, but I would not go so far: my hope is that I will convince my hon. Friend to consider introducing a scheme that might be fairer to the people involved.

In conclusion, I do not believe that a scheme of compensation can be fair. It can only make sense to the bean counters of the Treasury. Deferment may not be perfect, but it would be far better. I suggest that any costs incurred in a deferment would compare favourably with the costs of a scheme of compensation, in terms both of the total amount and of how well the money would be spent.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The focus so far has been almost exclusively on amendment No. 1. Would I be in order if I moved the debate on to amendment No. 33?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We are not dealing with that amendment at the moment.

Mr. Rooker: I was under the impression that we were still dealing with amendment No. 1. The debate involves a big issue but is narrow in that sense.

I am grateful to all the hon. Members who have contributed. There is a general understanding of how difficult it is to achieve a solution to this problem, and I understand how important it is to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Naturally, I have a preferred approach to this matter, which I have discussed with colleagues in the Government. However, I hope that I have not given the House a clue about my preferred approach: my intention is to support the Government's solution, given that one day my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I might have to present it to the House in detail.

A balance has to be struck in these matters. My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) summed up exactly the problems that could be encountered with a compensation scheme. He asked whether all the people involved would be caught, or whether too much public money would be spent on lawyers and accountants and administration, rather than being used for the greatest good. On the other hand, of course, there would be similar pitfalls with a scheme of deferment.

The Government have considered various options with the intention of trying to get a protected rights scheme—my legal advice is that that term is preferable to what my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South called a compensation scheme—up and running by April next year. It was simply not possible to do that. We cannot afford to have a scheme that does not work when millions of people are involved.

8.30 pm

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) asked about the Benefits Agency guide. It is not training material, and it would not be used to advise staff. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) highlighted the key point that misinformation was provided to the public for 10 years. I do not equivocate about that.

When I spoke about £5.5 billion, I was using shorthand; the figure for 10 years would be £5.5 billion with some add-ons, and the figure is not net but cumulative over the first 10 years. The figures bandied about for a protected rights scheme are much more diffuse, and that is one reason why reaching a conclusion is difficult. We are not short-changing people. That would be totally wrong. We will identify a solution as soon as possible.

[Mr. Rooker]

Points were made about the national insurance fund surplus, although, frankly, hon. Members who have spoken tonight have spent it about five times over. We cannot use a projected surplus for the current year or for any short-term period to make very long-term expenditure decisions. If the decision is delayed for 10 years, or if we create a protected rights scheme, there will be enormous consequences for years to come. The national insurance fund surplus could not be used in that way. That is not to say, however, that it will not be used. Current taxpayers will have to fund whatever decision we make. There is a hole in the finances from next year. The Treasury works years ahead and the legislative framework is there. Whatever solution we come up with will have to be paid for.

Mr. Pickles *rose—*

Mr. Rooker: If the hon. Gentleman wants to ask what I think he wants to ask, I probably do not have the answer.

Mr. Pickles: It might not be that. I asked specifically about proof. The Minister's predecessor made some promises about compensation for those who had suffered a loss, and made some progress on what standard of proof would be expected. What is the state of the Minister's thinking on that?

As my question is clearly not the question he feared, would he also answer whatever it was he thought I was going to ask?

Mr. Rooker: That was not the question that I was expecting, so I shall not answer the hypothetical one.

I cannot go further on proof. If and when we produce regulations, we shall have to cover proof, but how can one prove that someone made a phone inquiry to the Benefits Agency eight or nine years ago? What record would there be? In addition, the massive interest of the mass media in these matters might lead the press to publish a quick checklist of what a claimant would have to say about what he had or had not done or asked when he made his phone call all those years ago. I am not saying that the mass media would encourage people to tell fibs, but one can work out what might happen. I cannot go further at present, but we will do so when regulations are introduced.

The House should give the message tonight that Parliament and the Government are working together to get things right. We apologise for leaving people in the situation in which they find themselves today.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendment in lieu of the Lords amendment and consequential Government amendment agreed to.

Clause 1

MEANING OF "STAKEHOLDER PENSION SCHEME"

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 1, line 20, leave out

("or section 176 of the Pension Schemes (Northern Ireland) Act 1993")

Mr. Rooker: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 16, 83, 89 and 97 to 101.

Mr. Rooker: The Government disagree with Lords amendment No. 3. We agree with the others.

I am not sure what issues the House may wish me to discuss in relation to these amendments. The key issue is probably the purchase of annuities before the age of 75, a matter on which the other place spent some time. I shall concentrate on that matter, but, given the constraints of the guillotine, I shall be happy to deal with any points to do with the other amendments, some of which are technical. I hope that the House will be able to make quick progress so that we may move on to deal with bankruptcy, war widows, pension sharing and bereavement allowances before the guillotine comes down.

Lords amendment No. 3 removed the need for annuity purchase under a stakeholder pension scheme. I hate to say so, because when in opposition I always used to think that it was a lame excuse, but we disagree with the amendment because it is technically flawed. Tax legislation requiring annuity purchase before 75 is unaffected by Lords amendment No. 3. There is no mechanism by which a member can draw benefits beyond the age of 75 from a tax-approved pension scheme or stakeholder scheme other than through an annuity purchased before he or she has reached that age. The amendment refers to the wrong area of the law. Nevertheless, I sense the mood of the House. During one of my brief visits to the House of Lords during the passage of the Bill, the noble Lords were discussing this very point.

The primary purpose of a pension scheme is to provide a secure income in retirement. Valuable tax privileges are accorded to pension arrangements. The grand total of tax relief—which is essentially the Government's contribution to pension schemes in this country—stands at £11 billion a year. That is the Government's contribution to the pension scheme kitty and it makes the general public value saving for a pension. *[Interruption.]* I do not agree with the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who can make his point from the Opposition Front Bench. These valuable tax privileges are not available to people who are not contributing to pension schemes.

Mr. Willetts: The Minister refers to "valuable tax privileges". Contributions to people's pensions are, admittedly, tax exempt as they come from pre-tax income. However, that income is taxed on receipt—the right point at which to tax it, since any other arrangement would lead to double taxation. The regime is perfectly fair and symmetrical; it is not a special tax break.

Mr. Rooker: One reason why it is tax free is that the income stream is taxed. I do not seek to hide the fact that a balance is struck during a person's lifetime. However, the tax reliefs are conditional on the fund being used for pensions. That is the key issue.

Annuities provide a reliable lifelong income. There have been many debates about annuities, and I will share with the House an article about annuities that I read the other day—I have read a considerable amount about annuities in the past three months. I refer hon. Members to an excellent report from the Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds written by my friend and one-time colleague in this place, Dr Oonagh McDonald. I have met Oonagh to discuss the matter—I know that she has also talked to the Treasury—and she makes a valuable contribution to the debate. One paragraph caught my eye recently. It states:

"Imagine the scene: a man in a sharp suit asks you to save regular amounts for 30 years so that you can build up a nice big pot of money for your retirement. It sounds hugely sensible, so you follow his advice. But when you retire he insists that you give him all of the lump sum you have saved. You get back a very small part of your savings, he pockets the rest and pays you a pitifully low income to compensate. When you die, he keeps the pot of money for himself and your family gets nothing."

That quote comes from the first paragraph on page 49 of the September 1999 edition of Sainsbury's magazine. The article is headlined "Twilight Robbery", and it was drawn to my attention by a family member who said, "You've been talking about annuities and reading up about them, so you had better read this".

You will be pleased to know that I am not about to launch into a general debate about annuities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, many questions must be asked about that system. The fact remains that there is an age limit of 75. When I first came to the Department, I asked naively, "If a person finishes work at 65, what does he or she live on until age 75?" I was told that such people would have capital or other investments. I do not claim that it is about fat cats and the rich only; this is a serious issue about people's future pension provision and I intend to consider it seriously during my time with the Department. In the meantime, I ask the House to assist me in reversing the Lords amendment regarding stakeholder pension schemes.

I have read—and people have argued—that annuities are a bad deal. That is what the paragraph I quoted implies, but it is not necessarily always the case. Current annuity rates are somewhat less than their previous levels. However, if we can assure the public that we are entering a period of long-term low inflation, the purchasing power of annuities will be maintained far better than occurred during the 1970s and 1980s when there was fairly high inflation under Governments of both political persuasions. Inflation reached 16 per cent. or so under the previous Government and—before anyone corrects me—25 per cent. under the previous Labour Government. It is best to get such matters out of the way at the start. If there is a period of long-term, reliable, low inflation, annuities will maintain their purchasing power far better.

The income draw-down facility provides some flexibility for those who wish to defer annuity purchases. The danger is—this is not a nanny state—that, if income draw-down increases with age, the pot might be dissipated, leaving no money and recourse to state funds. That is why there is an age limit of 75: people are forced to acquire a secure income for the rest of their lives.

We continue to monitor the position. The Inland Revenue is engaged in an exercise to assess how the income draw-down arrangements are working in practice, and Dr. McDonald's contribution in that regard has been extremely helpful to the Government. We will assess in the round whether there is a need to change the rules on income draw-down in light of the current exercise.

At this stage, however, bearing in mind that the Bill introduces the new stakeholder pensions, it would be wholly premature to make that change only for stakeholder pensions. As I said, the amendment is, in any event, defective. The change would bring about two sets of rules for different money purchase schemes, and I therefore ask the House to disagree with Lords amendment No. 3. If necessary, I will be happy to explain our position on any of the other amendments.

8.45 pm

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): I did not expect to speak quite so early in the debate, so I am all the more grateful to you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be pleased to know that I do not intend to oppose him on Lords amendment No. 3—I note the look of relief on his face—but I want to speak briefly in favour of the important principle enshrined in the amendment, and I urge him to take careful note of that principle.

My hon. Friend said that the money from a pension scheme must be used to fund a pension. To be exact, in this country the money from a pension scheme must be used to fund a pension by the purchase of an annuity. That is not the case in other countries. There are plenty of examples available, and it is not beyond the wit of this country to devise alternative methods of providing for secure income draw-down so that funds are not dissipated by wasteful excess and people are not a burden on the state in later life. I know that the Minister and his Department are sympathetic to the idea of reform, and in the Inland Revenue there is at least now the will to make that change, however defective amendment No. 3 may be.

I want to draw the Minister's attention in particular to the position of thousands of members of the Christian Brethren in this country who are debarred, by their sincerely held beliefs, from taking out an annuity. What recourse do they have? They cannot receive the tax advantages that everybody else receives by saving for a pension, because they cannot take out an annuity. They do not believe in doing that because it is a gamble on their life. Those people work hard, pay their taxes, and honour their duty to the Government and the country, but they are given rights inferior to those that the rest of us have to provide for old age.

That position is grossly unfair, and the fact that it applies only to a minority of people in this country does not alter the fact that they are being discriminated against. I therefore urge the Minister to consider their case sympathetically and to add his voice to the clamour that is now arising in the press for the annuity system to be made much fairer.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): If amendment No. 3, which was introduced in the Lords by the Government, is defective, I wonder whether amendment (a) in my name is doubly defective. However, I shall seek to persuade the Minister that the age-75 rule should be abolished for all money purchase pensions, and not only stakeholder pensions, as the Lords amendment suggests.

[Mr. Michael Trend]

I was pleased to hear the Minister mention Dr. Oonagh McDonald, because her report agrees with that view. The campaign that has been led in this House by my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), which has received considerable press attention, has highlighted the difficult position faced by people who are coming up to age 75, when they will be forced to take out an annuity.

The House knows that our amendment seeks to abolish the rule whereby those with money purchase pension schemes are obliged to convert their savings at age 75, and Lords amendment No. 3 would abolish that rule solely for stakeholder pensions. We have campaigned for some time for the extension of that change to all money purchase schemes. Such a change would not break new ground. In 1995, the previous Government raised from 65 to 75 the age at which an annuity had to be taken out. We believe that the policy should be developed and the age-75 rule abolished.

The Minister made the good point that we would not want pension pots to be whittled down to the point at which people were forced to rely on state assistance, and I am happy for there to remain a requirement to ensure that nobody deliberately spends, spends, spends and becomes a burden on the taxpayer. However, that would be extremely unlikely because the people whom we are discussing are almost by definition some of the most responsible and conscientious in the country and of all levels of wealth. They will have forgone some of the pleasures of life to save for old age, and they are highly unlikely to break the habit of a lifetime in retirement.

Those coming up to the moment in their life when annuities must be purchased face a bleaker prospect than they have for some time. Owing to plummeting annuity rates and to the famine of long-term gilts, a person annuitising a pension scheme in the recent past could expect roughly half the income that would have been commonplace a few years ago. Once one has struck a deal on an annuity, it is for life; and if interest rates change and prospects for annuities get better, people will feel that they have had a very rough deal.

People are living longer. Naturally, those who are today buying into a low income as a reward for lifetime saving feel aggrieved. I have received letters from many constituents on the subject, as, I am sure, have all hon. Members. It seems only just to allow people the prospect of waiting a little longer and seeing whether they can get a slightly better deal later. Yes, we want people to have a secure income in old age. We are saying that they should be given greater flexibility as to the moment when they secure it. I urge the Government to treat the problem with great attention.

The Minister forbore to mention the review that he has up his sleeve—which is the usual response to our arguments in debates on the subject—and to suggest that the matter was being dealt with. However, with every week that passes, more and more people fall into the tough trap that is the 75-year rule. Once they have fallen into it, they have fallen into it for good.

I wonder what effect the current bad publicity about the annuity question might be having on stakeholder pensions. They are money purchase schemes, and the reputation of all money purchase schemes is surely tarnished to some extent if there are serious problems over the expected returns of annuities, as there are at the moment.

I agree with the Minister on one point. This is not an attack an annuities. They remain popular. They are reliable, and there are now many different ways in which one may take out one's annuity; but the 75-year rule is causing distress, and should go. I know that the Minister is looking at other ways—there are many—in which to increase flexibility, but the 75-year rule is causing more distress than anything else.

Owing to the extraordinary way in which we are doing business tonight, I shall not seek to divide the House on this matter, important though it is; but the Government should be in no doubt that this is a battle to which we shall return again and again.

Mr. Webb: I shall not detain the House long. I simply support the spirit of Lords amendment No. 3, while accepting what the Minister says about its technical deficiencies. The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) is right to cite his hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), who has pursued the issue doggedly. Some months ago, he took part in an Adjournment debate that I initiated on the subject—a full 90-minute orgy of discussion on annuities. It was a memorable way of spending a morning.

I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie). I, too, have been approached by Christian Brethren who are worried about this issue. Although one might argue with their interpretation of scripture, it is a sincerely held belief, and it would be unfortunate if Government policy forced them into something against their will or precluded them from making sensible pension choices. I echo what the hon. Gentleman said on that point.

The pensions Minister has mentioned several times that he is relatively new in his post. He seems to have acquired the desirable qualities of his previous boss: the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has a knack of disarming his critics by agreeing with them. Now that we have got through the fevered atmosphere of the debate leading up to 7 o'clock, the pensions Minister has agreed with us twice in the past hour, much to our surprise and encouragement. We were encouraged by what he said on the state earnings-related pension scheme. I hope that I do not misrepresent him when I say that it is encouraging that he appears so open-minded on the 75-year rule.

There appear to be only two objections to relaxing that rule. One is that people might become a burden on the state. There are plenty of ways to safeguard against that. The other is that such flexibility could be used as a form of tax avoidance. Rules already exist about the taxation of pots of money passed on to dependants, and surely those rules could be tightened. Although the Minister's predecessor argued against my case in an Adjournment debate six months ago, that was necessary because that was the Government line then. I sense that it may not be for much longer, and welcome that development.

Mr. Cousins: I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie).

This debate may ultimately prove to be one of the most important and significant in welfare reform. Although I take the point of Opposition Members about the general

nature of money purchase schemes, it is of particular meaning to raise the issue in the context of stakeholder pensions, which will extend the money purchase principle to new categories of savers who might be ill prepared and much more poorly advised than many of those who are currently taking out money purchase schemes over long periods. This is an opportunity to rethink the issue.

Some of the short-term measures that could be advised, such as extending the date on which annuities need to be taken out, could be considered. Looking at income draw-down might be another possibility. However, for people who may have very small pension savings pots, the income draw-down route could be quite dangerous and risky. We must consider a new kind of savings instrument that might combine some of the benefits of individual savings accounts with those of stakeholder pensions, allow flexibility between the two, and possibly in future also take into consideration the Government's proposals on long-term care. In short, there must be something rather more like an American 401K plan than the present money purchase schemes that current British tax law allow.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider the matter and that proposals will be made so that stakeholder pensions, from the very beginning, will have new characteristics that are free of some of the rigidities of money purchase schemes, which small savers cannot afford.

Mr. Flight: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) for their kind comments.

Now that we have a Minister responsible for pensions who is full of such common sense, I urge him to spend more time with Dr. Oonagh McDonald and to hasten the Government's addressing of the issue. I shall cover three key points.

First, the annuity is mostly taken out as a guaranteed annuity, which must invest in gilts. People are now retired for a long time. Even if a pension were drawn at age 75, it is quite likely that one partner would live for another 15 to 20 years. Any investment adviser who recommended putting all one's money in gilts for a 20-year investment would be done by the Financial Services Authority for bad advice. That is exactly what the guaranteed annuity does. It is simply not the right investment medium for a pot of capital—albeit one that is being run down—that is needed to provide an income over 15 to 20 years.

The second crucial point is that stakeholder pensions—assuming that they get off the ground—will greatly increase the volume of money purchase pensions that are building up. The guaranteed annuity depends on adequate gilts to operate at all. If we are to have continuing fiscal virtue and Government surpluses—or at least no Government deficits—where on earth will those new long gilts come from?

The Minister may have seen advice to the Government to fund themselves less at the long end in order to save money. If there is rising demand and nil new supply, or even a reduction in supply, it is not surprising that real interest rates at the long end fall, not just nominal ones. A great increase in money purchase pensions and a balanced budget just do not make sense from an investment point of view.

My third point is one that Dr. Oonagh McDonald has made very strongly. It may be a no-brainer for those with generous money purchase provision to limit what has to be an annuity to an amount such that they would never need to prevail on the state. The many people who need to be freed, particularly hundreds of thousands of women, are those who may have £30,000 or £40,000 in a pension scheme and may build up no more than that in today's money in a stakeholder scheme. I find it patronising to suggest that they will do better with a paltry annuity that they are forced to buy than they would by looking after the capital themselves. They will look after it much better. It will be the great nest egg for them against old age and nursing homes.

I conclude by asking the Minister to get stuck into the subject and to come up with changes quickly. The subject has been well aired and most of the arguments have been won in most forums. I am sure that Dr. Oonagh McDonald will be able to fill him in with any details that he requires.

9 pm

Mr. Rooker: Hon. Members commented on the requirement to purchase annuities by the age of 75. I always have an open approach—I even had one before 7 pm, so I have not changed my attitude. The age of 75 struck a balance at the time when it was chosen. I have already said that the Inland Revenue has the matter under review, in the time-honoured phrase.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) made an important point. Although private pension arrangements are voluntary and one does not have to enter into them, some private pension arrangements are perceived to be a gamble on one's life, so that people of a certain religious disposition are prevented from entering into them.

I am not fully assured that there are pension arrangements suitable for such people, whereby they would still obtain the benefit of the tax advantages. It is no good suggesting that they put their money in a building society. It is possible that new financial savings vehicles that are available, such as ISAs, would be suitable. I could have suggested PEPs, but those are no longer. If one is saving for a pension, one must know that the system will continue to exist for many decades, while one builds up a pot.

The matter had not been drawn to my attention until my hon. Friend recently raised it with me privately. I shall be happy to look into it. I am taking on extra burdens every half an hour as I speak, but these are important issues and it is the Government's job to find a solution. That is what government is about. We shall try to do that.

If my hon. Friend wants to come and see me or writes to me with the details, I shall get the Department of Social Security and the Treasury to look into the matter with regard to people of a certain religious disposition who cannot take up existing schemes, although I need to be reassured that suitable schemes are available.

The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) mentioned the bad publicity, which could cause problems. We must get the legislation on the statute book for stakeholder pensions and ensure that the Government do their job of advertising, selling and educating, while the industry promotes particular schemes to a population whom, by and large, the pensions industry has passed by on the other side of the road. People with moderate earnings of

[Mr. Rooker]

£9,000 to £20,000—the target group—may only remember headlines about mis-selling and misinformation, so it is important that such schemes are not affected by a bad press.

That point was made also by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). I pay tribute to the efforts that he and others have made. As a late incomer, I claim no credit for the debate. That is a result of our system of government. I have picked up the fact that an important issue is involved, arising from the Government's legislation for stakeholder pensions. There is a target group of 5 million people who, by and large, in view of their salaries, are not big savers. We have to create a system to sell them the concept of a money purchase pension scheme, which is something those people would never have contemplated previously, so the Government are obliged to get it right. We have to change the target group's perception, because we want to get as many of them as possible into stakeholder schemes as soon as possible. At the same time, we have to be careful of knock-on effects on the rest of the industry—we do not want bad publicity blowing up around specific problems with money purchase schemes to undermine stakeholder pensions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) said, it is important to be flexible. To the extent that I am allowed an open mind as a Minister, I have one. I have already said that I am making my own inquiries and asking my own questions. The issue did not come from the Box, but arose from debates in the House of Lords and from Dr. McDonald's contacting my predecessor. I shall be happy to take the matter further. That being so, and knowing that the issue will not go away, I trust that the House will agree, in this interim period, to reject Lords amendment No. 3.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 3 disagreed to.

Lords amendment Nos. 4 to 16 agreed to.

Clause 9

MONITORING OF EMPLOYERS' PAYMENTS TO PERSONAL PENSION SCHEMES

Lords amendment: No. 17, in page 21, line 10, leave out ("debtor's")

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 18, 19, 82, 102 and 163 to 175.

Mr. Bayley: In view of the time constraints, I shall be brief. To set out the background, the Bill provides that, in the event of bankruptcy, pension rights in a tax-approved pension scheme will be protected from seizure by the trustee in bankruptcy. However, to prevent people from using pensions deliberately to put money beyond the reach of creditors, a mechanism is needed to allow the courts to order recovery of excessive contributions. In deciding whether contributions were excessive, courts will have to consider whether the person's creditors have been unfairly prejudiced by the making of contributions and, in particular, whether any of the contributions were made for the purpose of putting assets beyond the reach of creditors and whether the total amount of contributions was excessive, in view of the bankrupt's circumstances at the time they were made.

The Lords amendments deal with the interaction of two provisions in the Bill: the pension entitlement on bankruptcy and pension splitting on divorce. The amendments do three things. First, they insert provisions for dealing with the recovery of excessive contributions in Scottish cases where the bankrupt's pension rights have been shared on divorce. Schedule 12 already contained provisions for England and Wales. Secondly, the amendments provide more detail about the way in which the provisions will work in cases where pension sharing has occurred. Thirdly, they make technical changes to clarify the drafting.

In summary, the amendments do not affect policy, but improve the way in which the measure is drafted. They are necessary to make the provisions work properly.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 18 and 19 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 20, after clause 18, to insert the following new clause—*War pensions for widows: entitlement—*

"—(1) A widow in receipt of a widow's pension under any of the enactments mentioned in subsection (2) ("the DSS pension"), and in receipt of a pension paid under the Armed Forces Pension scheme shall on remarriage or when living together as husband and wife with a member of the opposite sex, only retain the Forces Family Pension (attributable).

(2) The enactments referred to in subsection (1) are—

(a) the Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983, and any order re-enacting the provisions of that order,

(b) the Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme 1983, and any subsequent scheme made under the Personal Injuries (Emergency Provisions) Act 1939,

(c) any scheme made under the Pensions (Navy, Army, Air Force and Mercantile Marine) Act 1939 or the Polish Resettlement Act 1947 applying the provisions of any such order as is referred to in paragraph (a),

(d) the order made under section 1(5) of the Ulster Defence Regiment Act 1969 concerning pensions and other grants in respect of disablement or death due to service in the Ulster Defence Regiment."

Mr. Rooker: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment relates to the situation of war widows. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who leads on these issues, has asked me to put the case to the House, and I hope that hon. Members will find that acceptable. We recognise, as everyone does, the importance of ensuring that the dependants of those who are killed as a result of their service careers are properly looked after. The Government greatly value the contribution that those people have made for their country.

Amendment No. 20 seeks to retain for life a widow's attributable pension awarded under the Ministry of Defence's armed forces pension scheme. It would not affect payments under the DSS war pension scheme. Such pensions would continue to be withdrawn if the widow remarried or cohabited with a man, as would pensions paid to widows under the MOD's occupational pension scheme if their spouse's death was not attributable to service. It is quite a narrow amendment.

Introducing special arrangements for widows who receive the attributable pension would be anomalous, and might be seen as unfair by other service widows, because that would ring-fence that particular group of widows. That may be stating the obvious, but it is important to put it on the record. Other public service widows may also think it unfair. Under the schemes for the emergency services—the police and the fire service, in which men and women put their lives at risk during their public duty—occupational pensions are withdrawn on remarriage or cohabitation. We could create a festering sore among widows in many walks of life, and we do not think that that is the way to go.

The Government have had to consider the implications of the amendment for all public service schemes. It cannot be treated in isolation. Making widows pensions available for life would be very costly if applied across the public service as a whole. However, the Secretary of State for Defence is conducting a major review of the armed forces pension scheme. As a new Government, we are entitled to review these issues. Widows pensions are being examined as part of that review, including the issue of withdrawal on remarriage. We expect the report by next summer—we have put a target date on it: it will not get lost in the ether—and I cannot speculate about the outcome of that review.

The concerns expressed in the other place, which will be reiterated here, are fully understood and are not dismissed lightly. I cannot say more than that, because this is a sensitive issue. I will not go over the arguments about the reference in the amendment to the armed forces pension scheme. There are three different schemes, and the amendment affects only those widows in receipt of an attributable pension: it does not cover all service widows.

It would be premature to make a decision on this matter now without the benefit of the in-depth inquiry and review that is taking place to enable the House to come to a conclusion. The review will enable us to take into account the effect on other widows in other services.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I understand that the review is already behind schedule, as is common with such matters. If cases arise between the time when the review was launched and the decisions it makes, will the Minister consider any difficult individual cases, or will that be within the ambit of the review body?

9.15 pm

Mr. Rooker: I am not sure of the details of why the process has been delayed, but, according to the best information I have, the review is being conducted and a report is due by next summer. I do not know what the original timetable was or the reason for the delay, but I think that the House would be wise to await the results of the review before legislating, so that we can take into account service widows whose pensions are not attributable and, perhaps, other public sector widows in the circumstances that I have described.

Mr. Trend: The Opposition agree with the Lords amendment. Those who follow these matters in detail will realise that it represents a change in our policy—indeed, a change since the proposal was debated, very recently, in another place. I am quietly proud to be able to tell the House of that change, but well aware that mere good fortune has enabled me to voice what many Conservatives, on both Front and Back Benches, have for so long felt to be right and thoughtful. This is an issue that commands support throughout the House; it has only ever been a problem for Front-Bench Members, and it is now only a problem for Ministers.

The Government will have been told by civil servants—as we were when we were in government—that to concede this point will be to open the floodgates. That is what the Minister told us today. The Government may even have been persuaded to accept the red herring that some 68,000 widows are involved in the proposal. Both claims are simply untrue. It would be entirely possible to accept this modest proposal, strictly ring-fenced to post-1973 war widows, without further repercussions, and we are assured that there is no technical or legal reason why that could not be done. The Government are quite able to put their powerful shoulders against all sorts of floodgates if they are determined to do so; what is unfair in this instance is that a small group of people are unjustly on the wrong side of the Government's stubbornness.

I suspect that, when the phrase "war widows" is used in this context, most people conjure up a picture of women getting on in years whose husbands fought courageously in the second world war. That is far from the truth of what we are talking about. We are talking specifically about post-1973 war widows, and the total number of people in that group—those in receipt of attributable armed forces family pensions—is thought to be 2,650. At present, along with the AFFP, they receive DSS war widows pensions; if they remarry, they lose both.

The widows in question, ably represented by the War Widows Association of Great Britain—believe that to be grossly unfair, and a serious and understandable disincentive for them to remarry. Under the Government's current proposals for pension splitting on divorce, those women would be able to retain a share in their former husbands' occupational pension schemes, which is what the AFFP is; but the Government say that those who are separated from their spouses by death must lose both their DSS and their MOD occupational pensions if they remarry. That is a monstrous injustice. The great majority of private pension schemes, and an increasing number of public pension schemes, now pay bereaved spouses pensions for life, and it is surely a good thing for pension schemes to be regarded increasingly as the assets and the property of individuals rather than as a handout from a grudging Government.

The armed forces are different from any and all other public services. Service men and women are the only group in our society who are asked as a condition of their work to be ready to lay down their lives for the rest of us. They are not paid overtime; they cannot join a trade union; their contracts are totally different from contracts in the other public services. Their wives and families are

[Mr. Trend]

posted anywhere throughout the globe. It is impossible for service men's wives to take up careers of their own. I know that from personal experience, as I represent Windsor, a town with two barracks.

In fact, 806 of those widows are under 50 and 1,542 are under 60. It is not an enormous problem for the Government. Young women are involved, too. In particular, it is the children who suffer from the injustice of their late father's occupational pension being stopped if their mother remarries.

Recently, a large group of young children went to Downing street, where they were courteously received by the Prime Minister. Who could fail to be struck by the predicament in which those families find themselves? I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman was. I ask the Minister to consider accepting the amendment, even at this late stage.

We are talking specifically about post-1973 widows of service men who die, or are killed in the line of duty while still serving. Only about 2,500 individual cases are involved. A tough ring fence will be placed around that group of people.

Those who choose to remarry—it may be only a modest number—will, of course, stop receiving their Department of Social Security pensions, thereby allowing, I guess, the proposal roughly to pay for itself. We are talking about a tiny step for the Government, but a giant leap forward for war widows. It is an issue of simple human decency and justice.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): I wanted to speak on the issue to show that, on the Labour Benches, there are some concerns about the matter and that there is some sympathy for the view of the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend).

I accept that a review will take place. Much will depend on how seriously the matter is taken in that review. Obviously, what has been discussed in another place and here is relevant material, which the review should examine. The arguments have been put forward clearly.

The Minister said, "Why should the Army, Navy and Air Force be different from other public services?" The hon. Member for Windsor has responded to some of those points. I reiterate them a little and add some more.

Life in the forces is different from that in many other sectors. Many people place themselves in considerable danger in other public services—we are aware of that—but people serving in Kosovo and Northern Ireland face death continually. That may not be the case in other public services, although some terrible incidents occur in those services. However, as people in the forces face the problem day by day, some special consideration should be given.

The position of widows needs to be taken into account. They cannot develop careers readily and easily to provide for themselves later in life because of the nature of the service in which they are involved. They may move a dozen or more times during their life married to someone in the services, and will not have had an opportunity to build a stable career. They might even have great difficulty in finding employment in the areas to which they move. Often, life in the services is such that they will be expected to be involved in many unpaid activities around the camps, providing welfare services. They assist their husband's career, so theirs is a special case, which needs to be looked at. Many of the arguments that have been presented by the War Widows Association of Great Britain make those points. We should consider them seriously.

Whatever happens in the Divisions, I hope that the Government will take the matter on board seriously. I hope that they will not say just that the review can consider the matter. The review must take the matter seriously into account and issue a quick report that is based on the principles that have been discussed tonight.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) said that he was very proud that the Conservative party had changed its position on the matter since discussions were held in another place. I am very proud that the Liberal Democrats have not changed our position, and that we have been entirely consistent in our support for the Lords amendment. I very much hope that we shall have the opportunity to demonstrate that support at the end of the debate.

As has been said, we are talking about an anomaly—a fairly small anomaly affecting relatively few people. It is also a matter that we very rarely have the opportunity to debate, simply because it falls within the province of the Ministry of Defence and prerogative powers. This debate is one of the rare opportunities that we have had to explore the case on behalf of post-1973 war widows.

The current regulations are quintessentially archaic, as they treat the woman—the surviving spouse is usually a woman, but could be either gender—as a chattel and as someone who is dependent on their relationship with a partner, rather than as an independent person who has contributed equally to a partnership that has ended in the most tragic circumstances, in a death in service.

Yesterday, some of us were privileged to hear a lucid and extremely helpful briefing on the subject, and I was particularly struck by one statement made by the lady who gave the briefing. She said that the only real options available to a young war widow who wishes to retain the pension are to be single, celibate, promiscuous or homosexual. If she wants to preserve her pension entitlement on behalf of her family, the one thing that she cannot have is a stable relationship.

There are essentially three elements to the Government's position. The first is cost—which has already been dealt with by the hon. Member for Windsor. Implementing the change would not be a costly exercise. Indeed, a perfectly logical argument maintains that the Government would find themselves rather better off with the change.

The effects of precedent are the second element of the Government's position. However, I reject that argument, too. I do not believe that changing the provision for approximately 2,650 individuals will necessitate changes in other parts of the public service, or that there will be any clamour for such change.

The third element is the fact that a review is in process, and the Government maintain that we must await its completion. I reject that, too. This is an opportunity to correct a wrong that has continued for far too long.

Children are being been deprived of the opportunity to grow up in what should be stable families simply because of pension rules.

We have the opportunity not only to be fair to those widows, but to improve the terms of service of those serving in our armed services. Hon. Members who participate in defence debates will know how difficult it is to recruit and retain people in the services, but, today, we have the opportunity to make a significant change for the better.

Most of all, we should support those young wives and families who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in the most tragic circumstances, deprived of a partner.

The issue is not concerned only with the past—it arises every year. Every year, young people in our armed services are losing their lives in service. Often, they leave behind young spouses and families. The House would do well to reflect on that fact, and to take a rare opportunity to put right a rather small anomaly.

Mr. Dalyell: Given that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) is almost certainly anecdotally right in suggesting that there is a built-in financial disincentive either to marriage or to a stable relationship, I simply ask Ministers what advice they have had from their departmental experts on the costs if the Lords amendment were passed.

Mr. Rooker: I am all for giving as much information as possible. On its own, the amendment would cost the Ministry of Defence less than £15 million annually.

Mr. Dalyell: That was the factual answer that I wanted. I thank the Minister.

9.30 pm

Mr. Brazier: The school that I attended was set up for the sons of dead Army officers. The foundation for the sons of deceased service personnel continues to this day and there were several such children at school with me.

I should like to add two points to the excellent speeches that have been made already. First, it is a sad fact that today 40 per cent. of marriages end in divorce. It is a further sad fact that if one of the parties to the marriage comes in with children from a previous marriage, whether as a widow or as a divorcee, the chances of a divorce are even greater. If a member of the armed forces with children dies in action and his widow chooses to remarry, giving their children another father, she puts those children at serious financial risk. We must be clear about that.

I do not want to repeat the arguments that have been put so well already. My second point is that every hon. Member present tonight should ask themselves what sort of message we are sending to members of the armed forces, who risk their lives for us in so many uncomfortable and dangerous parts of the world, if we tell them that we are determined once again to save a relatively small sum of money by putting their widows and children in such a position if anything should happen to them.

Dr. George Turner: I shall be brief. I am willing to accept that this may not be the moment, but at some point we must take a positive attitude to try to find a way round the difficulties that seem to have prevented natural justice from being done for constituents who have written to me.

Many Labour Members cannot support the attitudes, particularly to young women, that we have inherited. People should not be discouraged from entering into new relationships by a financial penalty, particularly if there are young children. I accept the need to consider small cases in the round to ensure that we do not create one anomaly after another. I should like some reassurance that the Government will take a positive look at the issue and that the House will return to it before too long.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): This is an opportunity to make a small gesture for war widows. The Minister has told us that the cost to the Ministry of Defence would be £15 million. What would the saving be to the Department of Social Security, caused by the widows surrendering their DSS pension when they got married? Let us have some joined-up government. I want to know the net cost to the Government, not just the cost to the Ministry of Defence.

I should like to illustrate one of the manifest absurdities of the situation. Consider two identical families in the services. We are introducing pension splitting on divorce. The wife of one service man chooses to get divorced. She will get her share of the pension and can go on to remarry as many times as she likes—as my noble Friend Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish said, consecutively, not concurrently. However, if the other service man flies his aircraft into the side of a mountain or gets killed on active service in Kosovo or while training for active service and his wife chooses to remarry, she will have to surrender her pension. That is a manifest absurdity that we can put right this evening.

We have heard the Government's arguments about the difficulty of drawing a line, and the fact that 68,000 other service widows would feel aggrieved. I do not believe that to be the case. We have an opportunity to move the line microscopically. Enough is enough. The issue has been reviewed to death. It is time for the House to make a move. I do not know how Members of Parliament can sit here wearing their poppies, remembering the sacrifice of those who gave their lives, and then pass up an opportunity to make a minute gesture to help the widows and children of those who made a sacrifice for their country to rebuild their lives as they would wish. We should agree with their lordships.

Mr. Rooker: I welcome all the contributions to this brief debate, and a powerful case for change has been made. I do not mean this in a demeaning way, but the case is so powerful that the Opposition have changed their policy, and announced that this evening. I respect that, and I presume that it was not done lightly. We are entitled to give the matter some thought, and one cannot demean the Ministry of Defence's review.

I can assure everyone that I will metaphorically hotfoot it from this debate to the MOD to say what has been said here and in the other place, and ensure that that is properly addressed in the review.

To expand on my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the amendment on its own would cost the MOD less than £15 million a year extra. That £15 million would cover the cost of paying all

[Mr. Rooker]

service widows pensions for life, irrespective of whether the service was attributable or not. *[Interruption.]* I do not have a breakdown of the figures—my point is that the figure that I gave is larger than the figure for attributable service. However, one must balance that.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said that there would be no clamour from any other quarter. However, we live in the real world, and there will be clamour from other quarters. I am not saying that that is a reason not to make the change.

If similar pressure was put on the other public sector pension schemes to pay widows pensions for life, the total cost across the public sector for lifetime spouses' pensions would be roughly £150 million for each year of future service.

If the change was made retrospective to cover all past service for current serving employees, the capital cost for the public service pensions schemes would be approximately £1.5 billion. If it included those who had been awarded a preserved pension, that would double to £3 billion. I am putting those figures on record so the House has all the information that I have.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): We are grateful for the Minister's positive attitude. One point that has not been made about comparability is that the fire service and the police service have a provision for a gratuity on death in service which does not exist in this case. That is yet another reason for saying that this can be tightly ring fenced.

Mr. Rooker: Yes, and the review must look at this matter. The MOD is duty bound to come forward with the results of the review, in which the war widows association is playing a leading role. These points must be made to the satisfaction of all the Departments involved. There will be a clamour, and we must try to provide a secure ring fence.

There is no saving to the DSS, as the DSS war widows pension is withdrawn on remarriage. We are talking about attributable service, covering the DSS war pension scheme. That is not part of the amendment, which relates to the MOD schemes. It is a separate issue.

Mr. Barnes: There might be a slight saving in the DSS pension provision if more women were able to marry because of the removal of the constraint.

Mr. Rooker: I do not want to disagree with my hon. Friend, but the Lords amendment is specific to the MOD scheme. In response to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key): there is a gratuity in the armed forces pension scheme, which comprises three separate elements—I do not want to get into the details of the technical defects arising from that fact.

Mr. David Heath: The Minister is doing a good job of acknowledging the strength of feeling in the House and perhaps communicating it to other quarters, but I must press him again on the idea that there is no saving to the DSS. Logic suggests that if women remarry and therefore qualify for the change in the attributable forces family pension scheme, which is the substance of the Lords amendment, they must forgo the DSS pension that they would otherwise have been claiming. That is a countervailing saving.

Mr. Rooker: That happens already. The hon. Gentleman is effectively saying that to the extent that more widows would remarry because of the attributable MOD pension being kept for life, the DSS would make a saving. I cannot possibly give an answer to that hypothetical question. It would be preposterous for me to try to estimate how many widows would remarry because, and only because, there was a change in the MOD scheme. The only answer that I can give is that the saving to the DSS would depend on the numbers.

Mr. Blunt: Where does the £15 million come from if it is not based on an estimate that could equally be used for the DSS figure?

I commend to the Minister the words of Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, who was trying to deal with the issue in the DSS. When challenged on why he did not do anything about it, he said:

"That is a perfectly fair point. I did try—it is my only defence—but not very successfully. I sent letters to my noble Friend Lord Howe. I chased my civil servants across to the MoD. My noble Friend Lord Howe and I totally"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with quoting at such length in an intervention.

Mr. Rooker: Perhaps I have answered the debate inadequately. The point is that the MOD can be precise about what the cost to its budget of paying widows for the whole of their lives would be, because it knows how many of them are being paid its attributable pension. One cannot know the change in behaviour that would come about if the policy were extended to other budgets.

The MOD can give a precise figure that covered all service widows, because it is paying them now, but it is not possible to put a figure on the knock-on effect on the DSS and our thousands of different benefits, which have all grown like Topsy over the years.

The Government have got the message both from this debate and from the one in the other place. I ask right hon. and hon. Members to trust to the review; to put the maximum pressure on the MOD so that there is no undue delay; and to ensure—I give my commitment to this as a DSS Minister—that I make urgent representations to my right hon. Friend as a result of what has been said tonight. In that spirit, I ask the House to accept the Government's motion to disagree with the Lords amendment.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 363, Noes 193.

Division No. 285] **[9.44 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*	Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ainger, Nick	Atherton, Ms Candy
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Atkins, Charlotte
Alexander, Douglas	Austin, John
Allen, Graham	Banks, Tony
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Barron, Kevin
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*	Battle, John

Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berningham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Clause 50

NEW ALLOWANCES FOR BEREAVED SPOUSES

Lords amendment: No. 33, in page 56, line 23, leave out ("26 weeks") and insert ("two years").

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 336, Noes 241.

Division No. 286] **[10.3 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis

Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. David Clelland.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Flight, Howard
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil

Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. Keith Simpson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of the Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 34 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu thereof agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 21 to 32 agreed to.

Clause 52

WORK-FOCUSED INTERVIEWS

Lords amendment: No. 35, in page 59, line 12, leave out ("making") and insert

("who—

(i) makes")

10.15 pm

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Ms Tessa Jowell): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 36 to 39, 52, 59, 78, 88, 124, 125, 176, 179 and 180.

Ms Jowell: This large group of Government amendments makes two main sets of changes. First, it implements the recommendations of the Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Deregulation. Secondly, it clarifies that all claimants have the right to appeal against, or ask for a review of, a personal adviser's decision that they have failed to take part in an interview. It also makes a minor technical change to support joined-up government in the ONE service. All those—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call for order in the House. This is a complicated set of amendments; we must listen to the Minister.

Ms Jowell: All the amendments are technical. They do not change the ONE policy in any way.

Amendments Nos. 35 to 38, 78, 88, 176 and 179 implement the recommendations of the Select Committee. Amendments Nos. 35 to 38 are intended to exclude men and women aged 60 and over from having to take part in the mandatory aspects of the ONE service. Originally, we had planned to exempt that group through regulations, although we are now happy to accept the Committee's recommendations and to include the exception in the Bill.

As state retirement age gradually equalises over the next two decades, there is likely to be a need to amend the Bill to include all claimants who are below the age of 65. In the meantime, however, men and women aged 60 and over will still voluntarily be able to access support through the ONE service.

We are also happy to accept the Committee's recommendation that the first set of regulations under the clause should be subject to the affirmative procedure.

Amendment No. 39 clarifies that the clause gives all claimants the right to launch an appeal against, or ask for a review of, a personal adviser's decision that they have failed to take part in a work-focused interview. We have consistently made it clear that, where a personal adviser makes a decision on non-participation, the claimant should be able to challenge that decision.

In addition, we have always made it clear that claimants should also have a right of appeal against a decision that they have failed to participate. However, the original drafting of the provision failed to give effect to that policy intention. For example, a claimant who received a negative decision from a local authority personal adviser would not have had recourse to the disputes resolution procedures. Local authority personal advisers would not be able to revise their own or others' decisions, even where they were clearly incorrect. The amendment corrects that, making it clear that the disputes resolution procedure and rights of appeal should apply in all cases.

Mr. Willetts: May I help the Minister? So far as I am aware, the amendments to which she is speaking are not controversial. They are accepted in all parts of the House. As we have a guillotine, I assure her that the Opposition have no problem and are satisfied with the explanation that she has offered.

Ms Jowell: I am enormously grateful for the courtesy, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would like to hear the important clarification provided by amendment No. 180, ensuring that a claimant has a right of appeal against a decision that he or she has failed to take part in an interview.

Amendments Nos. 52, 59, 124 and 125 make necessary changes to support closer working. They give local authority staff working in the ONE service the same powers as the Employment Service and Benefits Agency to require jobseeker's allowance claimants to attend for interview. They also allow local authority staff to obtain the information that they need. With that explanation, I hope that the House will accept the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 36 to 39 agreed to.

Clause 55

SPECIAL SCHEMES FOR CLAIMANTS FOR JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE

Lords amendment: No. 40, in page 64, line 24, at end insert—

("(5A) For the purposes of, or in connection with, a scheme established for (or for an area which includes) Wales or a part of Wales, the National Assembly for Wales may, if it considers that facilities whose provision any person (including the Secretary of State) is undertaking under arrangements within subsection (5)(a) or

(b) are capable of being supportive of the training of persons for employment, make such payments to that person as the Assembly considers appropriate; and any such payments—

(a) may be by way of fees, grants, loans or otherwise, and

(b) may, unless the Assembly otherwise specifies, be used by the person to whom they are made for the provision of any of the facilities provided under the arrangements.")

Ms Jowell: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 41.

Ms Jowell: I hope that it will be possible to deliver the short version of the speech, rather than the longer version. The principle behind the creation of employment zones is to allow for the pooling of various funding streams currently available to help long-term unemployed people. It is straightforward to pool the funding in England, but more difficult for employment zones in Wales. Without the amendment, the money that the Welsh Assembly holds for training could not be used for employment zones in Wales.

There is also a small consequential amendment involving some renumbering in clause 55 as a result of amendment No. 40. I urge the House to support the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to [Special Entry].

Lords amendment No. 41 agreed to.

Clause 63

CERTAIN OVERPAYMENTS OF BENEFIT NOT TO BE RECOVERABLE

Lords amendment: No. 47, in page 69, line 24, leave out ("finding") and insert ("decision")

Mr. Bayley): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 48 and 49.

Mr. Bayley: These are technical amendments to clarify the power in clause 63. They do not affect the meaning of the clause and were agreed without debate in another place. I therefore commend them to the House.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 48 and 49 agreed to.

Clause 66

SHARING OF FUNCTIONS AS REGARDS CLAIMS AND INFORMATION

Lords amendment: No. 50, in page 72, line 32, at end insert—

("(3A) Regulations under this section may make different provision for different areas.

(3B) Regulations under any other enactment may make such different provision for different areas as appears to the Secretary of State expedient in connection with any exercise by regulations under this section of the power conferred by subsection (3A) above.")

Mr. Bayley: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 51, 61, 62, 126 and 178.

Mr. Bayley: These amendments ensure the effective operation of provisions to enable closer working between central and local government, an essential element of the Government's plans to provide customers with an integrated social security claims service. That requires provisions for information exchange to support integrated claiming.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 51 and 52 agreed to.

Clause 70

EARNINGS OF WORKERS SUPPLIED BY SERVICE COMPANIES ETC.

Lords amendment: No. 53, to leave out clause 70.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendments (a) to (t) related thereto, Lords amendment No. 54 and Government amendments (a) to (t) related thereto, and Lords amendments Nos. 77, 85, 86, 90, 93, 94, 128 to 140 and 184 to 191.

Mr. Timms: The amendments restore to the Bill the clauses dealing with the avoidance of national insurance contributions through the use of personal service companies and similar intermediaries. There are also consequential amendments to ensure that the clauses are covered by the commencement powers provided in the Bill.

In the March Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced his intention to tackle tax and national insurance avoidance through the use of intermediaries such as service companies. In such cases, a worker sets up a company to provide his or her services to a client in circumstances where, were it not for the service company, the worker would be an employee of the client. That allows the client to make payments to the company rather than the individual without deducting PAYE or national insurance. The worker can then take the money out of the service company in the form of dividends instead of salary; dividends are not liable to national insurance.

Therefore, it is possible for a highly paid office worker earning perhaps £1,800 a week to pay no national insurance contributions at all, while a nurse earning £300 a week pays £23.45 and her employer pays £26.53 in national insurance. A self-employed accountant making

£480 a week would pay about £35 in national insurance, whereas people using service companies can pay nothing at all. That is obviously not right and we are sorting it out.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am sure that the Minister will come to the detail of how the Government amendments will amend the Bill as originally drafted. He has just said that the clauses are intended to cover the circumstances in which a person goes from being employed to being a limited company so as to avoid national insurance. Is that the only sort of person covered? We interpret the clauses as covering every single person in a one-man business.

Mr. Timms: I shall now explain how the measures will work and I hope that that will answer the hon. Gentleman's question.

The Chancellor's announcement made it clear that the principle behind the measure—that avoidance had to be stopped—was not for negotiation, but that we would hold consultations on the details of the measure to ensure that legitimate businesses were not damaged. Soon after the announcement, the Inland Revenue sent out more than 1,800 copies of an information pack setting out a basic mechanism for delivering the Chancellor's objective; there were two consultative meetings with 38 representative bodies to discuss the details of the proposals; and 1,700 written comments and suggestions were sent in. Not only did we give the representative bodies the opportunity to comment, but we responded to what they told us with the changes embodied in the Government amendments.

10.30 pm

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman justifies his position on the ground that the Government have consulted. Given that the tax law review committee of the Institute for Fiscal Studies has been considering the problem of the classification of self employment for the past three years, will the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why the Government did not have the decency and wisdom to await its recommendations before coming forward with this blunderbuss of a policy proposal?

Mr. Timms: I read that point in the Conservative central office brief as well. The hon. Gentleman asked why we did not wait longer, given that that committee has been considering the matter for three years. We need to make progress, because there is a serious problem. People can choose for themselves how much national insurance they pay or whether they pay it at all.

I have had an interesting e-mail correspondence with someone who works on that basis in a government agency. His service company receives £25,000 a year from the agency, and he pays himself a salary of £15,000 and a dividend of £10,000. That is how he splits up the payment that his company receives. No national insurance is paid on the dividend. That split between salary and dividend is entirely up to him. He can split the money up how he likes, and he can choose for himself how much he pays and by what route. That is absurd.

That person could equally well take the advice provided in the 22 October issue of *Computer Contractor* in an article entitled

"Make hay while the sun shines".

The advice is:

"Review your present salary level. The optimum salary to draw this year is £4,335 which covers your personal allowance."

It goes on:

"Beg, borrow or steal to avoid paying higher-rate tax this year. Next year you will not be able to avoid it. You should recognise your company for what it is, a tax haven."

That is what we are changing in these proposals, and we are absolutely right to do so.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Many of my constituents will be extremely angry about the way in which the Minister has presented this case. Many of them are employed by oil companies and contractors, and have been forced to become self-employed contractors to maintain their livelihoods. Far from using this for tax avoidance, they are facing pay cuts. The Inland Revenue is capable, by negotiation, of discovering when people are using the system fraudulently. This legislation is quite unnecessary.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman is right. People were forced into this arrangement because of the strong tax incentive. We are happy for people to set up service companies, but we do not want the tax inducement in the system that forces people down that road. The hon. Gentleman is right to make the point that people have been forced into this arrangement against their will because the tax system has encouraged this practice.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I shall make some progress, and I shall give way in a couple of minutes.

There are good reasons for using service companies, apart from saving tax and national insurance contributions. They provide a flexible mechanism for supplying skilled personnel for short contracts, cut out paperwork for clients and allow workers to manage their careers more effectively. The changes that we are making to the mechanisms in the original proposals fully reflect that. These measures will deliver the Chancellor's objective of ensuring that people who work through service companies pay a fair share of tax and national insurance contributions while preserving the flexibility that is valuable in the modern employment market.

Mr. Swinney: The examples that the Minister gave are unrepresentative of the problem that the Government are trying to tackle. Some contractors may make a great deal of money, but they have to carry the strain during barren periods when there is no work in some sectors of the economy. That happens in the North Sea oil sector at certain times. The Minister should have given us representative examples, rather than the prejudiced views that we have heard tonight.

Mr. Timms: The position is exactly as I have described it. The arrangement allows people to decide how much they take in salary and how much they take in dividend,

[Mr. Timms]

which means that they can choose how much national insurance they pay. That cannot be right: it allows blatant tax avoidance, and is an obvious loophole.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I will not give way at this stage, but I will in a moment. I want to make some progress in presenting the case, because the changes that we are making are absolutely right.

The original proposals were subject to two complaints. The first was that a new burden was being imposed on the client to run PAYE and national insurance for his or her employee; the second was that there was a new and much tighter status test relating to the idea of control. The new proposal—the proposal that we are discussing—has only one feature. I have no objection to service companies, but the proposal requires service companies to pay a sensible salary to the person doing the work, rather than diverting the money into dividends.

Mr. Jack: So far, the Minister has used a broad brush and spoken in general terms when presenting his argument for reinstating this part of the Bill. He has just praised certain types of personal service companies. Will he tell us, in straightforward terms, how many are in his "good" category and are deemed all right, and how many are deemed not to be all right? Will he also tell us how much tax and how much national insurance is at risk? So far, he has given us no perspective enabling us to judge the merits of his case.

Mr. Timms: We do not know exactly what is happening in each of the companies concerned, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that large sums are at stake—certainly hundreds of millions of pounds. He said that I had spoken in general terms; let me give him the specifics. The modified proposals were published on 23 September in an Inland Revenue press release. They will place responsibility for complying with the new rules on the service company rather than the client. As I have said, clients will still have the option of continuing to hire workers through service companies on the basis of gross payment without the risk of a new tax or national insurance liability. The obligation to pay a fair share of tax and national insurance will still be there, but it will be an obligation on the service company, not the client.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister says that there will be an obligation to pay a reasonable, or sensible, salary. How would he decide what constituted a reasonable salary in the case of Firsway Computer Services, a small company in my constituency that is currently making a considerable investment in equipment? Surely it is not possible to pay what the Minister happens to deem to be a reasonable salary if it is necessary to make an investment in the business.

Mr. Timms: In a moment I shall explain exactly how the calculation will be made.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): My constituency contains one very large information technology firm and a number of small consultancies. Can my hon. Friend confirm that his proposals will not put people running small service companies at a disadvantage in comparison with large consulting set-ups?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend has raised an important point, which she has raised with me before. I know that she takes a close interest in the subject. I can confirm that there will be no threat, and no bias towards larger firms at the expense of smaller firms. There has been some misunderstanding about that, but I can give my hon. Friend the reassurance that she seeks.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I will not give way again, because I need to make progress if I am to answer some of the questions that Conservative Members have raised.

When it has been established that the new legislation applies to a worker, that person will be obliged to pay PAYE tax and class 1 national insurance on a minimum salary from the service company. The minimum salary is calculated by taking the money received by the service company from the client for the relevant job and deducting amounts for expenses paid by the company.

Those deductions are any expenses that an employee in the same circumstances would be entitled to claim as deductions for tax purposes—

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I will not for the time being.

Other deductions include any employer's contributions paid by the intermediary to an approved pension scheme on behalf of the worker, any secondary class 1 national insurance contributions paid by the intermediary in respect of the worker, plus a flat-rate allowance of 5 per cent. of the intermediary's receipts from relevant contracts. That deduction is to recognise the general and miscellaneous expenses associated with running a service company.

Sir Nicholas Lyell *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I give way, but then I will need to make some progress.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: Constituents have made the point to me today that the 5 per cent. allowance has to cover training and that it is wholly inadequate to do that in, for example, the information technology sector, as I am sure the Minister would recognise if he studied the matter carefully. What does he have to say about that?

Mr. Timms: Why did the previous Government leave so many gaping tax loopholes? It is high time that the loopholes were plugged. That is what we are doing with the change. It is high time that the change was made.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I will not give way. I need to make some more progress.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has stated that he will not give way at the moment.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I will not at the moment.

The rules that apply to everyone else, including people in the IT and engineering industries who do not work through service companies, are appropriate for IT consultants as well. Many IT consultants will be able to demonstrate that they would qualify to be treated as self-employed under the ordinary definition and therefore would not be affected by the legislation, but someone who works for a long period for a single client, sitting at a desk in the client's office, as part of a team consisting of a mixture of contractors and permanent employees, all doing identical jobs, should pay the same tax and national insurance as those permanent employees. It is wrong that the act of setting up a one-man company can enable— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is standing and shouting. The Minister has stated that he is not giving way at the moment.

Mr. Timms: It is wrong that that act should enable an individual to save over 20 per cent. in national insurance. That is the unfair competition that needs to be addressed and that we are addressing with the changes.

It has been argued that the proposals would favour big foreign firms over small United Kingdom businesses, but that is not true. Our proposals will prevent a form of avoidance that is only available to workers who control their own service companies and can use them to decide the form in which they take their income to minimise tax and national insurance.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: No, I will not.

It is not an issue for big companies that cannot be used by employees to manipulate the form of their income. Where there is evidence of tax avoidance by large companies, we are just as ready, unlike the previous Government, to act against that. The real competition that we should be concerned about is that between people who are employees and others doing substantially the same job, but using a service company to pay much less in tax and national insurance. That is unfair and we shall stop it.

The arguments in the other place against our proposals do not add up. There has been a well-funded campaign by a special interest group that is seeking to preserve its right to avoid tax—make hay while the sun shines. We are not going to back down; we owe it to the millions of taxpayers and contributors who are paying their fair share and who have to bear the burden when other people do not do so. I ask the House to support them, the motion and the Government amendments.

Mr. Trend: The Government try to be the little friend of all the world, but, tonight, they have voted against the disabled, war widows and the bereaved and, now, they are showing that they are no friends of entrepreneurs, or small business men.

The Government are trying to have it both ways. On Monday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer trumpeted a £40 million tax break for entrepreneurs, but, just two days later, the Government are supporting a £475 million tax grab on entrepreneurs. We have to judge the Government by what they do, not by what they say.

10.45 pm

The Government claim that their new stealth tax was designed to counter tax avoidance in the personal services sector. Let there be no misunderstanding about it: we clearly support efforts to tackle genuine tax avoidance. The Government say that there was general concern about the hiring of individuals through their own service companies in the interests of realising fiscal advantages. The Government's objective sounds whiter than white. But who are those wicked tax-dodging entrepreneurs?

Like other hon. Members, I have received considerable correspondence on the subject from constituents—all of them small business men of the kind the Prime Minister says he supports. One of them—the director of a small information technology consultancy business working within the mobile telecommunications industry—told me that forming his own business was a way in which he could progress and yet stay technologically up to date. He said that, if IR 35 is implemented, with the inherent possible risks of being out of work between contracts, there will be no point in continuing his business. Other constituents have written in the same vein.

Mr. Bercow: The message that my hon. Friend conveys to the House is one that will have been heard already today by many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House—not least from Mr. Robert Evans, a distinguished entrepreneur from my own Buckinghamshire constituency, whom I had the privilege of seeing earlier today. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the Minister is to justify his position that the provision will favour big companies over small, he should do the decent thing and issue today a list of the small companies that have supported his risible proposals.

Mr. Trend: My hon. Friend makes his own point extremely well.

If the Minister had met the hundreds of people involved in the issue who had the time and ability to come to the House today, he would have seen literally scores of people—honest, hard-working entrepreneurs—who were incredibly angry with the Government, who they feel have fingered them for a stealth tax. Those people are not artful tax dodgers, but decent, honest citizens who are using their initiative, expertise and hard work for career development and opportunities for increased remuneration—not at other people's expense, but from their own efforts. They may be ambitious, but what is wrong with that?

[Mr. Trend]

My constituents tell me that, without exception, if IR 35 is implemented, they may be forced to close the small specialist companies they have formed. The Government's proposed new stealth tax on the self-employed is calculated deliberately and viciously to penalise the very entrepreneurial society that the Government, with supreme hypocrisy, say they support. I should remind the House how the proposal came to be considered.

The proposal was first considered by the House on Report, on a night when the Government were trying to avoid another grief of their own making. The proposal then went off to another place. There, the original proposal was savaged, and then radically tinkered with. The new proposal, however, was just as half-baked as the original.

The Government said that they would consult on the proposal over the summer. However, there was no formal consultation document, no terms of reference, no invitation to explore alternative solutions, and no indication of the time scale of the consultation—all of which we should have expected to see in a matter of this importance.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does my hon. Friend realise that the matter has an even longer history? Does he know that the Inland Revenue made the same proposal in 1983, but that it was rejected by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer as bad for business? Does he realise that it was proposed again, in 1987, but that it was rejected again, because it was realised that it would be bad for business? Only the current Government—who do not understand what business is all about—have accepted the recommendation from tax officials.

Mr. Trend: The Government's acceptance of the proposal demonstrates that they have not taken on board the detailed criticisms of the proposal's effects on the knowledge-based economy.

We should also note that, despite the changes made in the other place, the bottom line remains the same. The Red Book stated that, in the first year, the proposal would enable a tax grab of £475 million. Less than two weeks ago, the Inland Revenue told us that the new proposal would yield £475 million annually. Whatever else has changed, it is not the Treasury's sticky fingers. There have not been overall changes—merely changes within the group targeted by the Treasury.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The Government are saying that anyone who takes dividends must pay national insurance on them. Surely the logic of that argument must apply to the millionaire entrepreneur who gets millions of pounds of dividend income and perhaps pays himself only £20,000 or £30,000 a year. Surely the principle that the Government apply to the one-man business must apply to everybody else. Perhaps that is their final solution.

Mr. Trend: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is no telling where the proposals might lead. I shall come to his point in a minute.

The proposals deserve detailed examination. It is unjust to Members of Parliament that the proposals have never been given proper consideration. It is also unjust to those who work in the knowledge-based economy, who have been treated high-handedly. We shall seek to get the House to agree with another place in keeping the proposal out of the Bill altogether.

Mr. Wardle: Bearing in mind the facts that the proposals affect tax as well as national insurance contributions and that the Contributions Agency is to be transferred to the control of the Inland Revenue, should not the debate take place when we consider the next Finance Bill?

Mr. Trend: The Opposition have made that point frequently. Now that the Contributions Agency has been transferred, it seems more logical than ever that the issue should be dealt with in a Finance Bill. The Inland Revenue aspects of the proposal will have to be dealt with in that way, so we shall revisit the issue many times next year, I suspect.

There are several important points that the Government appear not to have understood. I shall attempt to explain them briefly. The first is the importance of outsourcing. Over the past 20 years it has become increasingly common for high-tech companies to outsource some of their requirements for engineers and computing professionals. That is particularly important in the oil and information technology sectors, where projects commonly last between six and 24 months. The skills required are often highly specialised, and a client may not have a full-time post for an engineer with a given skill. Under those circumstances it makes good business sense to use contract staff instead of taking on full-time employees and laying them off at the end of the project. That way of working has become popular because it is flexible and efficient. It has nothing to do with any tax advantages of using a corporate structure.

The second point is that contract staff are as likely to be employees of large consultancies as independents working through their own companies. If the reason for outsourcing were to disguise employment and avoid tax, we should not find large consultancies providing salaried staff as contractors. One would also expect that the fees paid to a disguised employee would be less than the market-rate salary for a genuine employee. If not, there is no saving to the client. In reality, the rates charged are several times the corresponding salary.

The third point is that profits can be made from knowledge. The difference between the fee and the consultant's salary represents the costs and profits of the company providing the contractor. To equate the fee with the consultant's salary is to make a fundamental economic error: it amounts to saying that there can be no profit in providing skills and knowledge, but that is what the knowledge-based economy is about.

The Government's assumption has been that the same amount is paid as a fee to a service company or directly as a salary. That would hold in the case of disguised employment, but it is not the case in the knowledge-based economy, where the fee is generally three to six times the salary. That must be evidence that a genuine business

transaction is involved and that the arrangement is not to disguise employment. No client would pay such a premium simply to help a consultant to avoid tax.

There is a problem in trying to distinguish between an outsourcing contract entered into for genuine business reasons and one to disguise employment or avoid tax. The aim of the new proposals is to make that distinction by applying case law self-employment tests to any contract staff who work through their own companies or partnerships The Government want to apply those tests to each individual contract, leaving contractors uncertain about how much tax they will have to pay.

Contractors work as employees of their own companies, providing services to other companies. This outsourcing arrangement is the same as that where large consultancies are used, but small contractors are uniquely being told that 95 per cent. of their fee income will be treated as salary for tax purposes. The message is clear: "If you work, do not own your company; if you own a company, do not work." Bosses can make profits, but workers cannot.

My final point concerns fairness. The Paymaster General has stated in numerous letters to concerned business men that she wishes to see a fairer system. I am sure everyone in the House wants that. Independent consultants wish to be able to provide the same services on the same terms as the large consultancies—that is fair. They want to be free to use those profits in the same way as a large consultancy can use its profits—that is fair, too.

Those people do not wish to pay less tax than either an employee or a large consultancy and, in fact, they generally pay more tax than either. Lower overheads mean greater profits, which means more corporation tax paid, not less.

The Prime Minister, the Chancellor and other Ministers have repeatedly made statements about the importance of the knowledge-based economy and especially the IT sector. The contrast with these proposals is astounding.

The Prime Minister told this House only this afternoon that IR 35 would not drive legitimate businesses out of the country. But Richard Barron of the Institute of Directors has said that the Government proposals will hit

"a lot of legitimate businesses. The result will be less business being done in the UK."

The Professional Contractors Group reports that, every week, more of its members are leaving the country because of IR 35. Is it not the case that, far from making Britain the enterprise centre of the new economy, the Government are engineering Labour's new brain drain?

We will never tolerate abuse of the tax and national insurance system. However, it appears that other tackling approaches to abuse of the system have not been adequately explored. This could be addressed through a properly conducted consultation process. The use of existing powers, together with a degree of self-regulation within the industry, could tackle any real abuse.

So little thought has gone into these proposals that one must wonder whether the Government have been less concerned with reducing disguised employment than with increasing disguised taxation. This would be a grave miscalculation.

The Secretary of State told the CBI conference:

"Entrepreneurs take risks in the face of uncertainty and open up new markets. Governments must not hinder them, but work to ensure the market functions properly and contribute to a strong, just and fair society."

The Chancellor told the same conference that

"because we understand the importance of e-commerce we have set ourselves the task of making Britain by 2002 the most favourable environment in which to conduct e-commerce".

How do the Government think British businesses are going to adapt to the e-commerce revolution when the consultants who put those systems in place have been driven out of business or left the country? Why do the Government think that entrepreneurs should take risks in the face of uncertainty and open up new markets? It is the Government who are hindering them. Never mind working to ensure that the market functions properly—the Government are not contributing to a strong, just and fair society. We cannot have a knowledge-based economy with an ignorance-based Government. I urge the House to reject this whole shameful package.

Dr. George Turner: Having worked closely with many in the IT industry over a long period, I can assure Ministers that they are right to look at a long-running scandal—the abuse that can be made of one-person companies to the detriment of the taxpayer and the general public. There has been a complete lack of intent in terms of looking at the way in which people have abused that privilege.

11 pm

Will my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary explain a little more clearly his thinking on the distinction between the employed and the self-employed? As I understand it, if people are considered as effectively self-employed in terms of their relationship with the company that they are working for, an entirely different set of rules from those that he announced earlier would apply.

That is an important point, because I cannot see how people can call themselves entrepreneurs if their conditions are essentially those of a company employee. The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) seemed entirely to ignore that important distinction. The hon. Gentleman was correct, however, in saying that in many companies there will be peaks of demand for information technology skills that even large companies could not be expected to supply from their permanent staff, and that companies make up that skills shortfall in a mixture of ways.

Companies look to larger companies to supply consultants with wide experience to lead teams involving a mixture of permanent employees and the people whose position we are discussing. It is clear that it is in the interests of good IT that we do not prevent that happy mixture from continuing. The Government must ensure that no unfair advantage is taken of the simple basis of setting up a company. I think that the measures are designed to do that.

We must also ensure that we understand how important training is to those who want to work in that environment. The Government should carefully consider allowing those who can make a good case to the effect that they are providing a service of the kind that I have described to charge the appropriate training to their company.

[Dr. George Turner]

Appropriate training in this area is very expensive and is highly unlikely to be fundable by taking a few percentage points off the fee income that would properly be attracted under good working relationships.

We must ensure that, in protecting those who are genuinely using a company to invest in their own training and education and seeking to profit from it, we do not also allow through the large number of people who, as I know for a fact, have historically exploited the existing regime. I hope that we will continue to consider the issue sensitively, especially when there is doubt about whether someone has self-employed or employed status. We should in particular give sympathetic consideration to genuine expenditure on training.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Several veterans of the debate six months ago are present, including the Minister, but what has happened since is a gradual growth of awareness about what the measure will achieve. Some of us are beginning to receive postbags comparable to those on fox hunting and the issue is arousing real and strong feelings.

In order to take the debate forward, I shall address some of the arguments that the Government have advanced tonight. There are three arguments for what the Government are trying to do. One is revenue, the second is stopping what they regard as tax avoidance, and the third is fairness—the idea that nurses and computer consultants should be treated on the same basis.

On the revenue argument, when this debate started, we were talking about large sums of money. Some £450 million would be generated and would be spent on good causes such as schools and hospitals, and other things of which we all approve. The Inland Revenue has subsequently revised its estimate to more than £200 million, but that is also probably an exaggerated sum. One reason for that is that the contributory principle cuts both ways. If people do not pay national insurance contributions, they do not get the benefits, but if they are forced into being employees they become eligible for contributory benefits. Many of the people in that category have said clearly that if they are made redundant under the new regime, they will start to claim benefits. The loss to the Treasury will become substantially greater.

The other reason why the Treasury estimates are almost certainly exaggerated is that economic leakages will occur. That will happen in two obvious ways. First, some individuals will simply move somewhere else. The profession is very mobile and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) has pointed out in the past, several companies are moving to Frankfurt because of the new regime. It would not take an enormous flood of companies to do the same to cut the dividend tax revenue, and the value added tax that goes with it, to the point where all the supposed benefits of the measure would be lost.

The other channel through which loss will occur is that of end-users who cease to become competitive. Given the high pound, margins are very fine and the market is very competitive. Countries such as India are moving into the market, and they have good people and low costs. Work will be lost at the margin and revenue will be lost to the Treasury. The Treasury should supply a revised estimate of the real revenue from the measure. As a hint, perhaps it could draw upon the regulatory impact assessment that the Inland Revenue has done, which is parked in an obscure corner of its website, and which suggests that the loss of revenue will be substantial. The revised figure should take the leakages into account.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman said that leakages could occur in two ways, but there is a third way. Because software can be transmitted by e-mail, some individuals are planning to do their work in the United Kingdom but invoice from countries in the European Union, such as Holland. That will mean that we will lose VAT and the direct taxes, and other countries will gain. The Treasury has not done its homework.

Dr. Cable: I am sure that there will be other leakages.

Mr. David Heath: There is yet another form of leakage, in that businesses will cease to trade. The people who are engaged in those one-man consultancies are often in their late 40s and early 50s and are precisely the people who find it most difficult to re-enter the employment market. Instead of contributing to the Exchequer, they would become a drain on it.

Dr. Cable: I am sure that we could go on all night adding more channels for loss of revenue.

The second issue is that of avoidance. Ministers seem to have a caricature picture of many people who do ordinary nine-to-five jobs in IT companies, are paid substantial salaries, have a Porsche in the company garage and have some clever accountant to fix the tax system so that they do not have to pay NICs. That is a grotesque distortion of what happens. The strength of feeling has been summarised by my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). People really resent being characterised in that way. Many people who work as one-person companies have no choice but to work in that way, as many contracts issued in that business are issued only to people who are limited companies.

The irony is that some genuine tax avoidance problems exist. The Minister knows one of them, the Friday night-Monday morning problem, very well. That practice—when a person resigns from a company on Friday and signs up with it again on Monday—is an example of genuine avoidance. It is common in the industry, but the Bill does nothing to prevent it.

Mr. Wardle: Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that most sensible small business people will turn to the Inland Revenue for advice? Does he not agree with the tax experts in the Institute of Chartered Accountants, who say that the Inland Revenue's advice will not be fully operational until next year and that a backlog for that advice is therefore likely to build up? Should not the Government walk before they try to run?

Dr. Cable: A great deal of technical detail remains to be resolved, covering such matters as the definitions of schedules D and E, and the problem of expenses. I shall turn to those matters later, but the mass of detail, involving thousands of contracts, is too great to be sorted out in the next four months.

As for fairness, superficially, the question is plausible and reasonable: why should a nurse earning £20,000 a year be in a less advantageous position than a computer software contractor earning the same amount? That possibility sounds terribly unfair, but the two people are not in comparable positions, as the single-person company has no job security or contributory benefits.

The credibility of the fairness argument was destroyed by a cynical action that the Government took a couple of weeks ago, when they agreed to a loophole found by a delegation of City lawyers and accountants. Will the Minister confirm that, as a result, the City's six biggest accountancy firms, and its leading law firms, will now be exempted from the provisions of IR 35, even though the small computer consultants will still have to pay? If the fat cats are to be exempt from IR 35, it totally invalidates the moral basis of the argument about unfairness.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): A constituent of mine, Mr. Richard Hider, is a civil engineer with his own service company. His earnings tend to be less than £40,000 a year, which is a relatively modest income for a consultant. Does not my hon. Friend agree that it is totally unfair that the Inland Revenue should be looking to impose a tax hike of thousands of pounds on a person who earns such a modest income? Where is the fairness in that?

Dr. Cable: My hon. Friend is right, but it is revealing that interventions with further examples should be coming only from Liberal Democrat and Conservative Members. No Labour Member wants to intervene to deny what was been said.

Mr. Bercow: Such is the hon. Gentleman's concentration on his speech that he may not have noticed the ministerial reaction to the important point that he has just made. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that no contradiction to his point has been forthcoming, but is he aware that both the Minister and his Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker), have been looking elsewhere in pursuit of inspiration and advice?

Dr. Cable: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. The Government's central case has been unravelling by the day. What is so fundamentally wrong with IR 35? First, it betrays a complete inability to understand how new types of flexible employment are evolving in high-technology industries. The Government have been very good at the rhetoric of high tech—at handing out free laptop computers, and so on. It is not hardware but software that lies behind knowledge-based industry. The basis of that software is people, and we must understand how people work in industry. Much project work—in offshore oil and in the computer industry—requires flexibility, often meaning that someone works simultaneously for several employers. The tax system must reflect that, but it does not at present.

11.15 pm

The proposal will do serious long-term damage to a major British industry. I hope that the Minister will mention the Government's regulatory impact assessment in his reply, because I understand that it says that the proposal will seriously damage competitiveness among many companies struggling to operate. If I am wrong, I should be happy to be contradicted, but I understand that the Government's own evidence suggests that there is a serious problem.

Much of our argument has been about general principle, but several interventions have made it clear that the small print is often crucial. What will make the proposal lethally rather than mildly damaging will be the way in which the Government deal in practice with details such as the split between schedules D and E. Many provisions could do a lot of damage if the Inland Revenue treats them unimaginatively.

The control test is an example of that. If there is close supervision, for example, a person cannot be regarded as being self-employed, but many computer contracts require close supervision. In other cases, the application of standard tests would suggest that exemption cannot be gained for self-employment if the work is not finished, but the software industry often involves work that is being constantly adapted.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the use of the tools test? Contractors in the IT industry often have to invest heavily in computer equipment that they use at home to gain skills and conduct research, but which they do not take to work because they can use on-site equipment. None the less, they are using off-site tools to gain the skills that they need.

Dr. Cable: That point is fundamentally correct. Many tests were devised in a pre-computer age, some of them in the 19th century. Applying them unimaginatively and mechanically, as both I and the industry fear the Inland Revenue will, will do immense damage.

My final point relates to how expenses will be allowed for. Most people who work in the industry are staggered that the Government should imagine that the operating costs of running a one-person company are 5 per cent. of turnover. In most cases, it is probably about 20 per cent. once normal business administration, training and other things have been taken into account. The 5 per cent. figure is absurd and entirely disconnected from reality.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the movement to schedule E will mean that an individual trader who travels around the country to try to win a contract may stay overnight in an hotel and spend a fortune on an internal flight but will be unable to charge that against tax? That will hit smaller businesses even if it might be absorbed by the larger ones.

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman has opened up a whole new area relating to treatment of expenses. Many people in the oil sector—there are a few in the Chamber—have to commute to Norway, running up expenses that a sensible tax regime would allow for, but for which ours does not.

The Government's idea is badly conceived and it will do a great deal of damage. We will join the rest of the Opposition in flatly opposing it.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). I was encouraged

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

to see the Minister's body language earlier, but was deeply depressed by his answer to my question on training. The 5 per cent. allowance is plainly inadequate in a knowledge-based economy, particularly in information technology. I spoke this afternoon to a constituent who has worked in the sector for 14 years, has not switched into it overnight and spends much more than 5 per cent. of earnings on training. Yet that expenditure simply is not allowed for.

The Government's policy is a very serious mistake. I am encouraged because I think the Minister—whom I have seen frequently recently in Committee—is considering the matter carefully. I am convinced that the Inland Revenue has got it wrong.

I can speak openly about my constituent, Mr. Norman Silvain, who runs a small public limited company in the chartered accountancy sector that employs 12 people, because his views are entirely on the public record. He has told me straight that the Professional Contractors Group has clearly demonstrated the flaws in the Inland Revenue argument. I saw Mr. Silvain today, and he has set out those flaws on paper. I shall write to the Minister outlining Mr. Silvain's arguments, and I will expect a blow-by-blow reply. If that response is not convincing, I hope that the Government will get the message and change their policy.

That largely sums up my argument. Constituents who have written and spoken to me are genuinely offended by the notion that they are fly-by-night tax avoiders. They are not. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said, that is a caricature. Although consultation on the proposal lasted for some months, it has not proved satisfactory in depth or detail. The Government have not taken the care to listen to thoroughly responsible small entrepreneurs who know what they are taking about. They have to deal with these matters day by day, and most of them grant themselves realistic salaries on which they pay perfectly proper amounts of PAYE tax.

For example, my constituent Mr. Silvain pays himself a salary which, as I understand it, is approximately 50 per cent. of his company's gross earnings after he has paid his employees. He has to take account of pensions, national insurance, health insurance and training costs. His salary is entirely justifiable and it is on the record. The Inland Revenue and the Minister are not doing justice to the argument with their caricatures.

We seriously doubt that the Government will do anything more than pay lip service to business. However, the Opposition's objective tonight is not to make party political points but to persuade the Government to listen carefully and to rethink this measure, which they have got wrong at present.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I hope that I can be as brief as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell). At the outset, I must declare that I advise the Telecommunications Managers Association, a number of whose members certainly work through limited companies. Some will be caught by this measure and some will not.

I want to address the unfairness of the Government's proposal, which will catch only a small number of people—and certainly not the fat cats that Labour said in its manifesto it would pursue. I also have a limited company and I am not caught by the Government's proposal, although I am probably a fat cat. Perhaps the Government should rethink their measure in light of that missed opportunity.

The Minister had a short—he is still a young man—but distinguished career in the computer industry. Therefore, unless he suffers from amnesia—I know that the Government Whips are very good at giving Labour Members amnesia—he knows what we are talking about. If an entrepreneur starts up a company employing 100 people, makes £1 million a year and pays himself most of that amount in dividend—because his accountant tells him not to pay it in salary—why should he not have to pay national insurance when the one-man band is compelled to do so under the Government's proposal?

The only logical step for the Government to take is to move to a single tax system that includes national insurance and everybody paying the same amount. After all, nobody is getting contributory benefits any more. The Government wiped that out: if people have more than £8,000 in the bank, the benefits that they expected to accrue from paying national insurance are no longer available.

The real illogicality of this proposal is that it catches the person who has worked for a single employer for a long period. A person who has had three employers or who can show that not more than 50 per cent. of his or her work has come from any one source will be excluded from these requirements. Certainly, the mixed business in my limited company would allow me, because I am not employed by any other person, to ensure that I was fireproofed against these measures.

I have started two groups of companies, and on both occasions I began as a one-man band. One of the companies grew to employ 30 people. The other—my present company—employs only my wife and me, so it is not caught by the proposals. However, my first company, with 30 permanent employees and as many as 200 temporary employees, would never have got off the ground if, as the Government now propose, every penny that came into the company had to be paid to me in a salary on which I had to pay national insurance. I did not pay myself for the first three years; I had to live off the company's earnings because I put all the money back into the company to create employment for others.

IBM got rid of many of its staff, telling them, "You must go off and become limited companies." In the main, the individuals who had a single client in IBM thought that that was not a long-term solution and felt that they had to go and find other clients. These measures would stop them doing that because they would be unable to invest time and money in building up another client base.

People in employment agencies will face difficulties. The scientific and computer industry contains many limited companies that use employment agencies to find them work. How will the measures affect that situation, in which there are, so to speak, three in the bed? The amount that agencies charge is significant and it is certainly not 5 per cent. of the companies' earnings.

I shall give an example, because most hon. Members have not had the experience of being, effectively, a one-man company, as I have. Should we say to people who are employed by one individual that because 50 or 100 per cent. of their salary is given to them in expenses,

they should pay national insurance on that? The costs of MPs' offices, housing allowances, car expenses allowances and all the benefits of this place mean that we probably cost 300 times our salary, so should we now have to pay national insurance on that sum? It appears, from what the Government have said, that people who exploit labour and who have many employees will not pay national insurance on their dividends, and only the one-man businesses will be kicked into touch.

The Minister has the Treasury breathing down his neck. I know that he is mathematically competent; he was the treasurer of Pitcom, which means that he is also technologically competent. He will know that people who move from being an employee on a Friday to being a limited company on Monday have their total take-home pay doubled over that weekend because the company loses all its costs of sickness pay, holidays and so on. They pay themselves twice the original hourly rate, and sometimes much more.

We can calculate that such people move from a position of paying 22 per cent. tax on their marginal income and 40 per cent. on their extra income to a position in which that 40 per cent. tax rate applies to all the income that they draw from the company. Even if those people do not pay a penny in national insurance, the tax take will go up, not down. If the Government force those individuals to go back to being employed, the tax man's share will go down, not up.

When people are setting up a limited company, we should try to get them to roll over money into investing in the employment of other people, such as a secretary. The Government's proposals are wrongheaded and do not add to the Treasury take because they would put off many companies from investing in employees. The companies would probably go offshore because the internet allows anybody to work anywhere these days, and probably to pay their taxes anywhere.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): In support of my hon. Friend's remarks, may I give him the example of Mr. Simon Scantlebury in my constituency? In July, he told me:

> "As a freelance licensed member of a national organisation, I pay nearly £30,000 in Income Tax and National Insurance. If I am forced to work as an employee, my umbrella organisation will fold. Age 61, I will become unemployed. No doubt you agree this is extremely unsound economics!"

11.30 pm

Mr. Bruce: I hear what my hon. Friend says and I am glad that he related to me his constituent's case, but that individual case is multiplied by hundreds of thousands.

Are we attacking only those people? Will the plumber with 1,000 clients a year not be caught by the provision, simply because he does not have to pay himself a salary? He can pay himself dividends as well.

The Minister has given the House only 24 hours' notice of the changes that he asks us to make. The new proposals are as badly thought out as the original ones. I appeal to him, at this late stage, to withdraw them and, if necessary, to bring them back in the Finance Bill next year, when we may consider the entire matter again.

Mr. Jack: I hope that I have commanded the Minister's attention because, having been the last Financial Secretary in the last Government, I do know a little bit about how Ministers receive advice from the Inland Revenue about tax avoidance. I take issue with the Minister's comment that the last Government did nothing about tax avoidance. They did a great deal about it. However, the difference between our approach and his is that we checked our facts, and we dealt in law with obvious tax avoidance when we were convinced of the case.

The one thing that the Minister has not done tonight is to lay before us a clear set of reasons for his continued wish to restore clause 70 to the Bill. He could not give me an answer to the factual questions. He could not tell us of the analysis that he must have received from the Inland Revenue to determine his course of action. Just how many people does he believe are avoiding their proper national insurance and tax? We have heard nothing of that. How many examples can he cite of people who have, so to speak, done the Friday to Monday change that other hon. Members have mentioned—people who may well be genuinely taking advantage of the tax system to the disadvantage of the rest?

The Minister has done nothing to put the matter in perspective, and I am afraid that he looks like a Minister who has forgotten the meticulous way in which, as a Back Bencher, he used to question Treasury Ministers. He used to seek out the facts and get detailed information out of the Treasury. Since he has donned the clothes of ministerial office, that meticulous and forensic approach has gone out of the window, and he has bought straight into the typical Inland Revenue broad-brush estimating, whereby staff take a limited sample, multiply it by the largest number that they think of when they get up the next day, give it to the Minister and say, "This is roughly where we are."

In a telling speech, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) questioned the amount of revenue that was at risk. Will the Minister give us the facts? How much national insurance is at risk? How much tax is at risk? How have the calculations been made? I, for one, notice a lack of thoroughness.

I feel strongly about the subject because many of my constituents work for British Aerospace or for the Benefits Agency—in the latter case, a Government agency. As the Secretary of State for Social Security—who is in his place on the Treasury Bench—knows, that agency relies heavily on people who are flexible, in the form of being personal service companies, to do its business at an economic rate. Tonight, the Minister has put forward a proposition that will affect the Government. It will make the Government's business more expensive to do, and yet we hear no analysis on that point.

I have a constituent, Mr. Ian Shearer, who is a very interesting man. He and I have differed politically on many issues. For example, he very strongly opposed the sale of British Aerospace Hawk aircraft to East Timor. However, when it came to his personal position, he was very quick off the mark in seeking my assistance in making representations on IR 35.

Mr. Shearer said in a letter to me, "I am not a dishonest man; I want to pay my tax and my fair contribution. But in my business, as a personal service company, I bear the risk for my pension, sickness and unemployment, periods when I am not in work, and my training, equipment and investment. I cannot guarantee that I will be in continuous employment."

[Mr. Jack]

Mr. Shearer has all the characteristics of somebody in self-employment. As the hon. Member for Twickenham pointed out, Mr. Shearer may nevertheless have to work for quite long periods under contract—as he does for the Benefits Agency. The very nature of the information technology business requires him to trade in that way. When I asked him whether he felt that the Minister's revised proposals had done anything to redress the impact on his business and the loss of at least 10 per cent. of his income, he was sceptical, to say the least.

I held further consultation on the matter with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales because I wanted sound advice—more than the Minister has received. I asked whether it felt that the Minister's revised proposals had done the trick. The answer was no. The institute made a very interesting point: a sole trader running a corner shop who can, under such circumstances, make exactly the same decisions on salary and dividend as a personal service company, remains unaffected by the Minister's proposals.

In contrast, somebody trading entirely legitimately as a personal service company is affected in a way that suggests almost a witch hunt in Government circles against such individuals. The Inland Revenue's pursuit of that group of people is taking place against an unproven factual background.

Is it not interesting that, for its new friends in big business, perhaps in the world of property, Labour is quite happy to condone, for example, the sale of a building after the formation of a company whose sole asset is that building in order to get around some of the problems on stamp duty—we hear nothing from the Minister about that—but, when it comes to individuals making their living as personal service companies, providing flexibility to the aerospace industry and the Benefits Agency, the Government want to do them down? The case is unproven. The Minister should withdraw the proposal and go back to the drawing board.

Mr. Allan: When discussing taxation, we must remember that there is a balance to be struck between stifling industry and fairly raising revenue. It is very much the Liberal Democrat view that the proposals strike the wrong balance, and stifle industry.

We must also always consider in detail the impact in the real world of the proposals that we debate, rather than discussing their virtues in principle in a virtual world. The examples given in the debate show many of the potential real-world impacts of the proposals.

I am particularly concerned about the test to determine whether someone is an employee or a contractor. In the information technology sector particularly, many people will fall foul of that test, but should not. The requirement that somebody should be an employee rather than a contractor may end up killing some of the most successful, most entrepreneurial businesses.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) referred to Government contracts. I listened to the views of some contractors earlier, who threw out a challenge: will the Government employ all people on such contracts on the same terms once the new proposals come into force? Unfortunately, my suspicion is that much of that work will go elsewhere.

The new system will be bureaucratically burdensome and more expensive, so Government agencies will contract overseas, especially in developing areas such as India, rather than use UK-based contractors, as they would have previously. Will the Minister assure those who work for the Benefits Agency or under the many other Government contracts that they will continue to enjoy favourable conditions under IR 35?

I am particularly concerned about the many thousands of ordinary people who have micro-businesses, many of which, we must remember, grow into larger businesses. Over time, they may employ 30, 40, 50 or 100 people. Microsoft started as a three-man business in the United States. We have similar businesses that have grown into enormous corporations. People were given their first break on contracts, they developed the software skills and went on to become major earners in the UK and abroad.

I am particularly concerned about the age group to which my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) referred—the older people who have gone into the IT business. That has been a tremendous opportunity for them to retrain, set up a small service company and get into the IT business.

At a younger age, I found myself in a similar situation. I read an advertisement in *The Guardian* which asked, "Are you a useless arts graduate? Would you like to learn a profession?" It was an advertisement to study for an MSc in IT. I did the MSc and spent several years contributing to the UK economy. At the end of that period, I was on contracts that varied from day to day and were renewed monthly. Had I stayed longer—had I not stumbled into this job—I would have moved into a service industry and would have hoped to be successful there too. That is the spirit that we are stifling.

At the beginning of the debate, the Minister spoke about motivation. He was wrong to quote one article from one magazine that conveyed a negative view, rather than quoting from the many hundreds and thousands of letters that we receive from contractors, telling us what their motivation was.

One of my constituents wrote:

"In freelance consultancy, if I do a good job then I will be rewarded by getting repeat work and possibly more money. Conversely, if my work is not up to scratch then I can be asked to leave. Freelance consultancy has given me the opportunity to work for myself and has proved a great boost to my confidence and self-esteem."

That is the attraction for most contractors—the opportunity to run their own businesses. It is about the entrepreneurial spirit, not the sordid tax avoidance that the Minister presented to us. I accept that there are cases in which that is evident, but it is incumbent upon the Inland Revenue to root out such cases and produce regulations to catch the culprits, not to produce a broad, sweeping net.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Does my hon. Friend agree that the test has always been whether a contract is a contract of service or a contract for services? The Inland Revenue has always focused on the badges of a trade. Does my hon. Friend agree that the

Inland Revenue is giving Ministers outdated and destructive advice about the badges of a trade and a contract for service?

Mr. Allan: My hon. Friend leads me neatly on to the point with which I intended to conclude—how we decide whether someone is an employee or not. I have referred to the issue of tools, which are essential to the IT industry. Everyone must pay his gate shilling every year to have the latest upgrade of software, in order to remain competitive.

A service provider must have sophisticated computer equipment at home costing many thousands of pounds, if he wants to compete in the IT industry. He does not take that equipment to work, but it is essential to his work. He may end up on the same bench as employees, working on the same machines as employees, but the services that he is providing are utterly dependent on what he does at home, outside the workplace, when he is in employment and working at night—many of those people work extremely long hours, not nine to five—and in the periods between employment, when he builds up and retrains in his skills.

Tools are fundamental. Any notion of a small percentage is ridiculous, given the cost of computer equipment, which a service provider must buy every year to remain at the cutting edge. Training is also fundamental. The service provider may work at the same bench as his employees, but he is employed because of his specialist skills. Another constituent who is a document imaging processing technician wrote to me, telling me about his training. He had a four-year degree, a one year masters degree, and spent seven years on his PhD.

Services consultants get their jobs because of what they carry in their head. That is fundamental to a knowledge-based industry. They get the work because of their 12 years of training. It is not apparent when they sit at the same bench as someone else, but it is the reason why they got the contract. That must be recognised in the rules. I see no sign of it in IR 35, as implemented in the Bill. I hope that the House will throw it out tonight in order to give the Government a chance to think again.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I shall be brief. Unlike many of my colleagues and those on the Liberal Benches who have spoken out of anger, I speak out of sorrow. I am unusual in the House in that when I was in the private sector, I created a company in an activity that was not being practised in the United Kingdom before. I can therefore lay some claim to having planted an acorn that has become an oak.

11.45 pm

I remember 40 years ago, when we were building that business in the 1960s, the ball and chain fastened around our ankles by the selective employment tax introduced by the then Labour Government and the obligation to pay out all our profits in dividends unless we could prove to the Inland Revenue that we needed to retain them in the business: those forces held back the growth of our business. The industry in which I was engaged now carries out hundreds of millions of pounds worth of work in this country; the company in which I worked employs 50 times as many people as it did when we started out and its volume is a thousand times greater. However, although our productivity and growth is thus demonstrated, there is no question but that we were slowed down by Labour legislation that showed no understanding of the activities in which we were engaged. That is why I speak in sorrow.

I have total confidence that the Government will modify the legislation when they see the damage it causes. I simply regret the opportunity cost to our economy until they realise the error of their ways.

Mr. Fabricant: The Minister was disingenuous, saying that the Government are closing a loophole that the previous Conservative Government had overlooked. As I said earlier, the Inland Revenue proposed the package of measures twice before, and twice before the Conservative Government rejected it because we knew that it would be bad for British industry. Now, the Labour Government have reintroduced a measure that has previously been rejected because they do not understand industry.

Hon. Members from both main Opposition parties have spoken of constituents whom we have met today. Over the past two and a half weeks, I have received via the internet 2,600 letters from people all over the country expressing opposition to the measure. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) is absolutely right to say that the Government will have to change the legislation later, because it is not only the software industry and training consultants that will suffer, but freelance journalists too. Mark my words, once freelance journalists realise that they are being hit hard in the pocket, they will write about it and the Government will start to change direction, as they always do when they think that they are becoming unpopular.

The change to schedule E will mean that small, entrepreneurial companies will suffer, because small companies have to go out to seek business. Large companies that do that can charge expenses against tax, but small companies will now be unable to do so. A small company cannot afford to spend £240 travelling to Aberdeen to win a contract, but, having failed to win it, be unable to charge that expense against tax because it is precluded by schedule E. That is not only wrong and unfair, but crippling to smaller businesses. The Secretary of State shakes his head, but what did he do before becoming a Member of Parliament? He was not in business, so he does not speak from experience. He has simply become a Labour apparatchik imposing a measure similar to the selective employment tax, which was imposed by previous Labour Administrations and which destroyed businesses.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I agree with every word my hon. Friend has so far uttered and with the views expressed in this debate by other right hon. and hon. Friends and Liberal Democrat Members. Does not such a debate make the people of this country consider the relevance of the House of Commons, when the argument is so clearly overwhelming, but the Government, for party political reasons, ill-advisedly refuse to change their view?

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—the Government are merely dupes of the Inland Revenue. Twice the Inland Revenue came up with the scheme and twice it was rejected by a Conservative Government; but,

[Mr. Fabricant]

because they are desperate to make hundreds of millions of pounds from small business men—small business men who should be able to become large business men—the Labour Government have accepted the scheme.

I started as a small business man: my business ended up operating in 48 countries worldwide and employing hundreds of people in the United Kingdom, each of whom paid tax. If this legislation had been in place when I started my business, it would never have got off the ground. Entrepreneurs are the future of Britain. The Government have shown their true colours. They will stifle entrepreneurs at birth, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Timms: I have listened with great interest to all the points made by Opposition Members. Not one of those who spoke against these changes addressed the central issue. The present arrangement allows people to choose how much national insurance they pay, or whether they pay it at all. They can choose how much they take in salary, and how much in dividend. No one can defend that arrangement, and no one has attempted to do so. That is the position that we are in, and it is the basis on which *Computer Contractor* advised people, in its most recent issue, to take a salary equal to the lower limit of personal allowance.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I shall not give way at the moment.

That state of affairs is not defensible. No Government can stand back and allow that situation to continue. The country will want to know why the Tory party is a soft touch on tax avoidance.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I am not giving way.

The opportunities for avoiding national insurance contributions are plain for all to see. I accept that many people do not take the opportunity to avoid paying their national insurance contributions. We have heard about some of them, and I have been in discussion with someone in that position. The opportunity to avoid paying national insurance is available for anyone who wishes to take it. That is clearly not right, so we need to make these changes.

I emphasise that, under our proposals, people are free, as they have been in the past, to establish service companies. All that has changed is that those service companies must pay their proprietors a sensible salary so that the national insurance that is due from them is paid.

The Government have been and will continue to be vigorous in promoting enterprise. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor spoke earlier this week about enterprise management incentives, which have been widely welcomed. Everyone must pay their fair share. That is the basis on which our economy works, and it is right that everyone should contribute. All of us have the right to services and benefits as a result of our payment of tax and national insurance. We also have a responsibility to pay our fair share, and these new arrangements will provide for that.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) asked me for some figures. The estimate of the revenue at stake has not changed: it is about £220 million into the national insurance fund, and £255 million in income tax. Our position on that has remained consistent. We estimate that the number of individuals who will be affected is about 100,000.

The hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), in an earlier intervention before his entertaining contribution towards the end of the debate, which the House will have enjoyed, asked about the expenses that people can claim. The proposal in the 23 September press release is that they can claim the expenses that an employee in the same circumstances would be entitled to claim as deductions for tax purposes; so the hon. Gentleman is mistaken on that point.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Do the figures given by the Minister mean that 100,000 people will have to pay an extra £4,700 in tax?

Mr. Timms: As I have made clear, there are substantial opportunities for avoiding national insurance, and people are freely being advised to take those opportunities. Any responsible Government would act to close the loophole, and that is what we are doing. It should have been done years ago, but we are doing it tonight, and it is absolutely the right thing to do.

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Miss McIntosh *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I will give way to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), who has been trying to intervene for some time.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, but he does not seem to appreciate the depth of feeling in the country against IR 35, which is reflected in the amendment.

Is it normal procedure for a Government to indicate a substantial change of policy through an Inland Revenue press release? Some of my constituents feel that they have been dealt with in an underhand manner, by stealth. A tax has been imposed on them, and the only notification that they had came in a press release.

Mr. Timms: The proposals published on 23 September have been received extremely well around the country. They have been widely welcomed, not least by the

Chartered Institute of Taxation and the Professional Contractors Group. The debate has continued, but as I say, the changes have been widely welcomed.

I defy the hon. Lady, or any of her hon. Friends, to defend the arrangement left by the last Government whereby people can choose how much national insurance they pay, or whether they pay any at all. That is the central issue in the debate, and those who have spoken against the proposals have not addressed it. No one has sought to defend the present position, because it is indefensible. That is why we are making the changes that we are making tonight, and we are doing absolutely the right thing.

The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) suggested that some other way of making the changes was available. I should be interested to know what proposals he has. The current position has existed for years; the last Government had 18 years in which to tackle it, and conspicuously failed to do so. That is why we need to take action now.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), a distinguished former Treasury Minister, raised a number of points. Let me tell him that all Governments, including his, want to tax genuine small businesses differently from employees. The employment status tests are the agreed and long-established way of making that distinction, and will continue to be used in that way for the purpose of this measure. That is absolutely right.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner)—who has explained to me that he has had to leave the Chamber—asked me about the distinction between self-employment and employment. The conventional distinction will be used to decide whether the new rules apply to service company workers. That means that the same criteria will be applied in the same way as they always have been in the past. There is no intention of applying the rules in any different way. They are well established and well understood; they are flexible; they take account of the whole pattern of a worker's engagement, so that a skilled worker who works for many different clients can be treated as one who is self-employed.

Today, the Inland Revenue sent out to representative bodies—the Professional Contractors Group and others, including those in the information technology industry—a draft guidance paper to clarify the way in which the criteria will apply to a typical situation involving a service company. That is the consultation. As always, we are determined to get the decisions right and we shall listen to the responses that we receive, but those criteria and guidelines will make the distinction as clear as it possibly can be, and will simplify the issues that service companies have to face.

It being Twelve o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order this day.*

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 345, Noes 203.

Division No. 287] **[12 midnight**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith

Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James

Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mr. Keith Simpson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Amendment proposed to the words so restored to the Bill: (a), in page 74, line 36, leave out "in any specified circumstances".—[*Mr. Kevin Hughes.*]

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 344, Noes 166.

Division No. 288] **[12.13 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen

Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Government amendments (b) to (t) to the words so restored to the Bill agreed to.

Clause 71

EARNINGS OF WORKERS SUPPLIED BY SERVICE COMPANIES ETC: NORTHERN IRELAND

Lords amendment: No.54, leave out clause 71.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—[*Mr. Kevin Hughes.*]

The House divided: Ayes 337, Noes 124.

Division No. 289] **[12.26 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald

Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, Christopher
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew

Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (t) to the words so restored to the Bill agreed to.

Clause 84

EXTENT

Lords amendment: No. 85, in page 87, line 23, leave out (", 70")

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 104.

Division No. 290] **[12.39 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Cona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad

Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Blunt, Crispin
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, Christopher
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Moore, Michael
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spring, Richard
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 93, in page 88, line 4, leave out (", 71")

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 301, Noes 91.

Division No. 291] **[12.53 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise

Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Blunt, Crispin
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Moore, Michael
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spring, Richard
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond

Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 55 to 84, 86 to 92, and 94 to 191 agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put,

That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments Nos. 3, 20, 46, 85 and 93; that Mr. Richard Burden, Mr. Kevin Hughes, Mrs. Eleanor Laing, Mr. Eric Pickles and Mr. Jeff Rooker be members of the Committee; that Mr. Jeff Rooker be Chairman of the Committee; that Three be the quorum of the Committee; and that the Committee do withdraw immediately.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 76.

Division No. 292] **[1.7 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Mike Hall.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Blunt, Crispin
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hancock, Mike
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Moore, Michael
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spring, Richard
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Webb, Steve
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. After nearly two decades in this place, may I ask you please explain how, after a vote on the composition of the Committee, those who voted against its proposed composition can serve on it? [*Interruption.*] I hear a noise on my right, but it is of no consequence.

I ask for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How can traditions be so abused by a stupid vote?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In these circumstances, Members are bound by the decision of the House. That is quite routine.

Mr. Bermingham: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already dealt with the point of order.

Mr. Bermingham *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bermingham *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must sit down when I am on my feet. I have dealt with the point of order. What the hon. Gentleman has done is the wrong way of dealing with these matters, and we shall now move on to the next business.

COMMITTEES

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to Committees.

Ordered,

COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

That Mrs. Barbara Roche be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. Stephen Timms be added to the Committee.

That Mr. Robert Maclennan be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. David Rendel be added to the Committee.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

That Mr. Charles Kennedy be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Privileges and Mr. Malcolm Bruce be added to the Committee.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

Future of Rugby League

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

1.19 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Let me begin by expressing my gratitude for the opportunity to initiate the debate, and my appreciation to colleagues who have remained in the Chamber until this late hour owing to their concerns about certain issues relating to rugby league. I know that many of them—my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, Central (Mr. Benn), for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) and for Halton (Mr. Twigg)—hope to make brief contributions later.

Let me begin by declaring certain relevant interests. I hold 500 shares in Wakefield Trinity rugby league football club; I also chair the league's professional players consultative committee, which negotiates between the professional clubs and the players' union. The post is not remunerated, and pays no expenses. I am secretary of the all-party rugby league group, which has about 80 members from the House and another place.

I welcome the Minister to her new post. She has my personal good wishes for the work that she will do. I know that she has a great passion for sport of all types. She has been a member of the all-party rugby league group and, in 1995, participated in the previous debate on the subject, so she is aware of the background to many of the issues about which we are concerned. I believe that this is her debut on the Front Bench in her new position. She could not make it on a more important issue, as I am sure she appreciates.

The title of the debate implies some doubt and questions about rugby league's future. I want to express a personal view. The sport, in both an amateur and professional sense, has a positive future. I will express no doubts about its future. I have concerns merely over the implications of rugby league's administrative structure, particularly the controversies over the merger of certain professional clubs.

In stressing the positives, I recall that, in 1995, when the announcement was made in Paris that rugby union had gone openly professional, Ian Robertson, the BBC's "rugby"—that is, union—correspondent, implied that it signalled the end of rugby league—that it had no future.

Several years on, we see the contrasting fortunes of professional rugby union and professional rugby league. Those of us in rugby league believe that the league game has proved its supremacy and will continue to do so over the years. Certainly, attendances at professional rugby league matches are far higher than at equivalent professional rugby union matches. Therefore, we can stress many positives. This season, attendances at several league matches topped 20,000.

Mr. Colin Burgon (Elmet): Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity, even though he comes from Wakefield, to commend Castleford Tigers, a small-town club with average attendances of 6,000-plus? Does he agree that the club's community-based approach shows the way forward for rugby league? In his much-valued opinion, what can the game learn from "classy Cas"?

Mr. Hinchliffe: Although they have had a successful season, Castleford were beaten by Wakefield Trinity, but I pay tribute to Castleford's work. I stress my hon. Friend's point: rugby league is essentially a community sport. Clubs such as Castleford are rooted in the local community and have been successful as a consequence of their connections with that community. In the context of mergers, links with the local community are crucial, as my hon. Friend has said.

Let me make one or two other positive points on the future of rugby league. The amateur game has spread throughout the country since the barriers in relation to union were lifted. The summer conference league, which has existed for the past two years, has spread like wildfire across central and southern England. Clubs are queueing up to join the league. Players who have played only union have not had the opportunity to taste the great game of rugby league. That expansion throughout the country is encouraging.

The game is expanding in the armed forces. It was banned in the forces until 1994; a campaign in this place lifted that ban. The armed forces rugby league is growing.

On the issue of bans, I draw hon. Members' attention to early-day motion 972, which is in my name and deals with the position in France during the second world war, when rugby league was banned in disgraceful circumstances. The sport operates against a background of some vindictive treatment, especially from rugby union in recent times.

The game is expanding in colleges and universities. I stress that there is far more female involvement in rugby league. When I go to matches as a spectator, certainly super league matches, I reckon that, on average, about 50 per cent. of spectators at many of the clubs are female. Now, vast numbers of women are playing rugby league, enjoying a great game that I have enjoyed over many years. Rugby league's future looks very positive.

I should like to deal in this debate primarily with current proposals, some of which have been formally agreed, on the merger of some professional super league clubs. My hon. Friends and I are here today primarily to voice the concerns of rugby league fans in the communities that we represent about the proposals.

One element in the controversy over the club mergers is the difficult financial position of some of the clubs. Player costs were certainly inflated by the initial professionalisation of union, in 1995. Although it is easy to criticise those who are involved in pushing for the merger of clubs, I appreciate that many business people and individuals with a commitment to the game have spent great sums keeping clubs afloat.

Additionally, super league clubs have been receiving less from Sky Television. Consequently, super league clubs have developed an agenda to reduce their number, from 14 to 12. As a further consequence, this year, £1.25 million was made available to clubs that were prepared to merge.

The key issue—I hope that the Minister will address it today—in the proposed mergers is the way in which, in the past few years, three separate administrative arms

have developed in professional rugby league. The first is Rugby Football League, which is the game's constitutional governing body, comprising all the professional rugby league clubs.

The second is super league Europe, which was introduced after the 1995 introduction of super league. Originally, super league Europe was simply a marketing arm of super league, but now has its own headquarters, chairman and chief executive.

The third is the Association of Northern Ford Premiership Clubs, effectively comprising the old first division.

The problem with the current proposals have been caused by the division of responsibilities between those three bodies. Currently, there is a proposal to merge the Huddersfield Giants and the Sheffield Eagles. I should say that I have a constituency interest in the Huddersfield Giants because my constituency includes two Kirklees wards containing significant numbers of Giants supporters. The Giants are based, of course, in the town where the game was founded, in 1895. It is one of the greatest teams in the history of rugby league.

The Sheffield team was established only 15 years ago, in virgin territory. However, it has done excellent development work and—less than two years ago, in 1998—won the challenge cup.

We also have proposals to merge the Hull and Gateshead teams. Hull has another of the greatest teams in rugby league. Its recent demise seems to coincide with the involvement of the tennis player David Lloyd—who has recently bought shares in the Gateshead side, thereby driving forward the merger between the two clubs. Last season, Gateshead was admitted to super league as a new franchise.

Another piece of the jigsaw that will concern my hon. Friends who have attended this debate is that, next season, a new Sheffield club may be admitted to the premiership. Mark Aston—the former Sheffield Eagles player—is proposing admission of the team, entailing the possibility of a team dropping down to the premiership and competing there. However, that will depend on the agreement of the premiership clubs, which have an organisation and constitution separate from those of super league.

Another factor is the position of the Hunslet Hawks—my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Benn) may want to mention that team—which won the Northern Four premiership. The team is not quite sure whether it will be in super league or in the Northern Four premiership. Ultimately, however, its position will depend on whether Hull drops out of super league.

The situation is complex. Thousands of rugby league fans are baffled and angry about what is happening to their much-loved local sides. I want to stress the connection between rugby league teams and the local community, because it is essentially a community game. More than any sport that I know, rugby league is rooted in local communities and is part and parcel of them, particularly in the north of England.

Many professional players do not know whether they have a job for next season. Some clubs have reneged on their contract because the club has been contracted to disappear. They do not know whether they have a living. I am concerned about their circumstances. The situation does not reflect well on the game.

I want to conclude in time to give some of my hon. Friends a chance to have a brief say in the debate. The heart of the problem with the current mergers is the administrative split between the key elements of the sport. It is crucial that professional rugby league should get back to one coherent whole under its constitutional body, the Rugby Football League. The Government have a role to play in assisting the process and I look forward to the support of my hon. Friend the Minister in bringing that about.

1.31 am

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): My constituency covers Widnes, which has one of the most famous rugby league clubs in the history of the game. They were world champions as recently as 10 years ago. The club had a difficult period a few years ago and did not make the transition to the super league because of an arbitrary decision on which teams would be included. There is some bad feeling about the exclusion from the super league of one of the most successful teams in the history of the game.

After going through a difficult time with many problems, the club has a new stadium that is probably second to none and meets all the criteria for the super league. The club has a new financial structure, new management and a team that is starting to become more successful. However, the management structure of the super league and rugby league generally causes confusion about who makes decisions and who supports who.

Widnes has submitted a bid for super league status, but we are not yet sure about the outcome of the bid. We understand that the independent body that is considering it has said that Widnes meets all the criteria, but we are still waiting for a decision. We shall hear about Hunslet later. The problems there also show complications in the management of the game.

My hon. Friend the Minister cannot interfere with the running of the game, but I should like her to bear it in mind that if our teams are to compete against the best in the world from Australia and New Zealand, we need to look closely at what has happened. The change in organisation that has concentrated most of the money in a smaller number of clubs has not produced a national side capable of matching Australia or New Zealand. In the two matches in recent weeks the Great Britain side did very badly. The new structures have not improved standards in the game.

Widnes is getting better gates than many super league sides and has further potential to increase its crowds. There are very few super league clubs on the west of the Pennines. Most of them are in Yorkshire. Widnes could increase gates and interest and bring added value and benefit to the game, but the club seems to be kept out.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) has said, rugby league is a community game. It cannot be taken away from the community. Various bids have come from historically non-rugby league areas and have not succeeded.

The classic example is the idea that Gateshead and Hull should merge, as Gateshead only came into the super league last year and have done reasonably well. There has

[Mr. Derek Twigg]

been talk of Welsh and Scottish teams coming into rugby league, while Widnes—from a traditional rugby league area, with the support and the facilities—has been denied the opportunity to get into the super league.

We need a complete review of how the game is organised, and a review of whether the organisation is delivering in terms of the quality of rugby league, while meeting the needs of the communities that want to take part in the game.

1.35 am

Mr. Harold Best (Leeds, North-West): Most of the things that I might have said about the organisational problems of rugby league have been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe).

I want to emphasise the community nature of the game, which produced a competitive spirit that enabled communities to bond around workplaces, hotels and schools. It is a natural, organic game, which is at once divisive and unifying.

I speak with a lot of personal experience—I am a former rugby league player. I played to a fairly good level, and I enjoyed the game enormously. I learned the game when I was at school and, throughout that period, it was strictly amateur. I will never forget playing for Leeds city schoolboys and being advised by a teacher—a Mr. Hepworth—that we should beware of the money that was in rugby league. I did not understand what he meant, and I thought it was something to do with his enthusiasm for rugby union and the amateur game which he had played some years ago. Now I think I understand what he meant.

The influence that money can have upon a community sport can be devastating. The drive in sport should be that which comes naturally from the community need expressing itself. I live right outside the ground of Leeds rugby league club. I live on St. Michael's lane, which is the front for the Yorkshire county cricket ground and the Leeds rugby league ground. I watch fans from all clubs coming to play there. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield says, at least 50 per cent. are women. It seems to me that women are the growing force in rugby league support.

It is not just women—I see children hand in hand, wearing different club scarves and mingling, and there is no hostility whatever. The sport brings peace and enthusiasm to a community and gives notions of team spirit and high-quality performances. That is what rugby league has been about.

Regrettably, in very recent times, we have seen the new side emerging—takeovers and the manipulation of the ownership of the game and the grounds on which it is played. I am sorry to say that that kind of competitive spirit has little or nothing to do with the game itself.

Anything that the Minister might say tonight to assist those inside the game who are seeking to restore its honourable and sporting competitive tradition would be extremely welcome. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Benn) will have an opportunity to speak, and I remember playing against the club in the heart of his constituency, Hunslet, as an amateur. It was the first time I heard their song, which went:

"We swept the seas before, boys, and we'll sweep the seas again."

I am looking forward to that song being sung by Hunslet fans in the new super league.

1.39 am

Mr. Hilary Benn (Leeds, Central): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on having secured this debate. I want to draw attention to the position of the Hunslet Hawks rugby league club. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) said, the name Hunslet has long been connected with rugby league. The club has a proud history. The board of directors is forward looking and there is a committed supporter base in south Leeds. In the last season, a very fine team took the Northern Ford Premiership title by winning the very last game of the season. It swept the seas, as we have heard.

The club was thus entitled to seek promotion to the super league and it put in an application, but it has been turned down by the franchise panel, ostensibly because its otherwise excellent South Leeds stadium does not have the required capacity. In close consultation with the city council, the club made proposals that would immediately—in time for the start of the next season—increase capacity from 2,500 to 5,500, with an increase to 10,000, which is the requirement of the super league, to follow.

Apparently, that was not good enough. The club then offered to play temporarily at other grounds that met the capacity requirement, but that was also turned down. It is not surprising that many supporters feel that whatever the club offers will not be good enough. Many supporters feel great disappointment and frustration because, having earned the right to show what it could do in the super league, the club is being denied the opportunity. Even at this late stage, I would hope that the rugby football league could reconsider the decision.

1.41 am

The Minister for Sport (Kate Hoey): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and all my hon. Friends who have spoken. It is a tribute to the support that they have given to rugby league in their constituencies that so many of them have turned up to contribute and listen to the debate tonight.

I am very familiar with the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield has done in promoting rugby league in this place. The professionalism of the all-party rugby league group is a credit to all those involved. I am very pleased that it was one of the first groups to congratulate me on my new post and invite me to address it.

Rugby league has a long and distinguished past and I hope that it has a future to match. It is one of the many sports that this country has given to the world and now finds it increasingly difficult to compete in successfully at international level. The sport is deeply rooted in the community that it serves and from which it originates. All sport needs to remember where it has come from, because if it forgets its roots and goes for short-termism, it will begin to decline.

All of us here tonight have agreed that it is important to protect the game's long-term interests and that money alone will not make it successful. Next year, rugby football league will play host to a reconstituted rugby

league world cup, and the Government will support it strongly, with funding from UK Sport's major events budget; the decision on the exact amount will be made in the next few months. It is important for such major events to come here, as they will give an excellent opportunity to increase the sport's appeal.

The Government are committed to supporting all sports. We are especially keen to promote sport, including rugby league, in schools. I welcome all the initiatives aimed at encouraging more youngsters to participate. I saw the excellent work being done at St. John Fisher school in Wigan to help youngsters in sport. We will work with whatever structures are in place for the organisation of a sport. As my hon. Friends have said, it is ultimately for the sport to decide how best to organise, but it must do so in the best interests of the game as a whole. I would welcome moves to streamline organisation, as long as all levels in the sport are catered for.

I am fully aware of, and understand, the strength of feeling that has been generated by the recent merger proposals. That has been mentioned tonight, and I have received much correspondence on the subject. I have also met Neil Tunnicliffe, the chief executive of the Rugby Football League. My plea to the league and to the clubs would be to canvass the views of supporters when the mergers are discussed. The clubs cannot take the support of supporters for mergers for granted. The clubs have to listen to supporters and examine their plans carefully. If mergers take place without both clubs' supporters' support, the danger is that the merged club will not work, no matter how much financial support it receives. I am keen to ensure that the Government work with rugby league to listen to what local communities are saying.

The future of rugby league is bright, and large amounts of money are available for the game at grassroots level and at the elite level, including through the world-class performance grants. Direct grant-in-aid funding to the Amateur Rugby League Association of £250,000 will fund development officers and improve the women's game—my hon. Friends have mentioned the many more women who are involved, and I welcome that. More money will go into world-class performance grants, including a £170,000 interim lottery award to provide training and expertise for top-class players.

The issues that have been raised tonight parallel other issues in rugby union and other sports. They are complex and, in these days of professionalism, sponsorship and money, will cause concern in local communities. Professional rugby league clubs compete in a competitive, commercial environment. Recent innovations, such as ground sharing with football clubs—for example, in Wigan—have helped to lighten the load on some clubs, but without a firm financial foundation, clubs will always struggle.

The increase in funding for the game brought about by the television deal with BSkyB has helped several clubs, but it is questionable how much benefit it has brought to the sport as a whole, with much of the increase being eaten up by the increases in salaries for the top players. That is a real dilemma for sport, and sport itself must determine it, because it is important not to take the short-term view.

I look forward to the results of the inquiry undertaken by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport into the future of professional rugby in both codes. I hope that it will add significantly to the debate on all aspects of both sports and specifically provide some guidance to rugby league on the way forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 4 November 1999

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER PLC (GROUP REORGANISATION BILL)[LORDS]

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the Alliance & Leicester plc (Group Reorganisation Bill) [*Lords*] shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office of their intention to suspend further proceedings not later than the day before the close of the present Session and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

Ordered,

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the next Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the present Session;

Ordered,

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

Ordered,

That since no Petitions remain against the Bill no Petitioners shall be heard before any committee on the Bill save those who complain of any amendment as proposed in the filled up Bill or of any matter which arises during the progress of the Bill before the committee;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

Ordered,

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—[*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH BILL [LORDS]

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the United Reformed Church Bill [*Lords*] shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with the Bill, if they think fit, in the next Session of Parliament, provided that the Agents for the Bill give notice to the Clerks in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present Session of their intention to suspend further proceedings and that all Fees due on the Bill up to that date be paid;

Ordered,

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the next Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the present Session;

Ordered,

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first time and shall be ordered to be read the second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read);

Ordered,

That, no Petitions against the Bill having been presented within the time limited during the present Session, no Petitioners shall be heard before any committee on the Bill save those who complain of any amendment as proposed in the filled up Bill or of any matter which arises during the progress of the Bill before the committee;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the present Session;

Ordered,

That these Orders be Standing Orders of the House.—[*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Private Recruitment Industry

1. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): When he plans to respond to the consultation document, "Regulation of the Private Recruitment Industry". [95822]

The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson): We will respond once we have fully considered all the representations received.

Mr. Swayne: The Department's regulatory impact assessment gives little indication of the compliance cost of the proposals, because the Department says that it cannot calculate the extent to which behaviour will change as a result of them. Behaviour will change because elderly and vulnerable people will be unable to afford the cost of care in the home. The VAT element of the proposals alone will add £1 an hour to that cost. What is the benefit to public policy of charging that to elderly people in order to raise £40 billion a year for the Chancellor's burgeoning general election war chest?

Mr. Johnson: The consultation documents that we published in May have been well received by everyone involved with the employment agency business, for instance, those concerned with health care, such as Age Concern and the United Kingdom Association of Home Care Workers. The review is designed to promote labour market flexibility and protect elderly and infirm people where there is ambiguity about whether their carer works for the agency or for the hirer.

We shall not be awarding any Dan Dare badges to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out that there are VAT implications. That was stated clearly in our document and we are working closely with the Treasury to resolve those problems during the consultation period.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Would the Minister acknowledge that he has received some strong negative representations about the proposals' impact as they relate to temp-to-perm fees? Does he agree that, if this regulation goes through in its current form, it could do serious damage to people who wish to enter the labour force on a flexible basis, particularly women returning to work and people from disadvantaged groups? Will he give a categorical assurance that, once the regulation is published, he will have a further round of consultation with those most likely to be affected by it?

Mr. Johnson: We pointed out clearly that we do not seek to end the practice of temp-to-perm; we seek to end the situation where an individual who works for a company is prevented from being hired as a permanent employee by arrangements that have been condemned by many in the industry. We seek to end restrictive practices among employment agencies, and that has been widely welcomed.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): I welcome the Minister to his first Question Time and congratulate him on his appointment. Does he realise that the proposal to introduce restrictive regulations on temp-to-perm fees charged by employment agencies, and the proposal to charge VAT on all a temporary workers' wages rather than just the agency fee element, are hugely damaging, bureaucratic and interfering? Is not that yet another example of the Government saying one thing to business about lightening the burden of regulation, but doing the opposite and introducing huge swathes of new, burdensome regulation on British business?

Mr. Johnson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming me to the Dispatch Box. He has got this matter wrong. Age Concern has made the position absolutely clear in its submission, which stated:

> "Many of the proposed changes are entirely consistent with the broader thrust of Government policy: enhancing the protection of vulnerable people; improving the quality of services; and ensuring minimum standards in employment practice. Age Concern . . . wholeheartedly supports these changes."

The simple truth is that if we did not change the regulations that have been in place for 26 years, we would leave the most vulnerable people—the elderly and infirm—in a position where, as Age Concern recognises, they would be responsible not just for employment law but for tax law and the health and safety of the people caring for them. That is why the changes are necessary and why we intend to carry them through.

Enterprise Challenge Centres

2. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will make a statement on progress in establishing enterprise challenge centres in universities. [95823]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): We have recently announced the establishment of eight centres of enterprise in the university sector at a cost of £25 million. The centres will promote the exploitation of knowledge and will make a major contribution to the development of an enterprise culture in the UK.

Mr. Edwards: Can my right hon. Friend tell the House where the centres are to be located and how they complement other initiatives introduced by the Government to bring science and enterprise together?

Mr. Byers: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question, because I can now prove that there are eight centres: at Bristol, Cambridge, Glasgow, Imperial College London, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield and the London business school.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): That is seven.

Mr. Byers: No, there are eight—I just checked.

Those centres will have a wider regional focus, looking not just at the needs of their own cities but at those of their whole region. The objective of the new centres of excellence is to ensure that we can exploit commercially the knowledge that resides in our university sector, which was badly neglected during the 18 years of the previous Administration. We shall provide £25 million to ensure that we can use that knowledge to create British jobs and British investment for British people.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the roles of those enterprise centres is to seek partnerships with people outside universities in knowledge-based industries? Why did he not make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Social Security to prevent the regulations on IR35 from going through? I have received—as, I am sure, have many hon. Members—representations from many people in the knowledge-based industry. [HON. MEMBERS: "How many?"] I have received 2,600 representations from people saying that they will leave the United Kingdom or will invoice from outside the UK, because they cannot survive with the IR35 regulation. Does the Secretary of State accept that, without the writing of software, there is no e-commerce and there is no knowledge-based industry?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman has learned nothing from his party's 1997 election defeat. The Tories are yet again defending a tax loophole. We have heard it all before, and we are hearing it again today. The Government consulted widely on the changes that the House voted in favour of last night. As a result, we were able to close a tax loophole with the support of the industry. That is what our proposals do, and that is why the House agreed to them yesterday evening.

E-commerce

3. **Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): What steps he is taking to promote the expansion of e-commerce. [95824]

17. **Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): What measures he is taking to encourage e–commerce. [95840]

The Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government are determined to ensure that the United Kingdom is the best place in the world for electronic commerce. Our vision and strategy for achieving that was set out in the report "e-commerce@its.best.uk", which was launched by the Prime Minister in September.

Mr. McWalter: I welcome my hon. Friend to her new duties. She has the ability and energy to do this important job.

I understand why the Treasury felt it necessary to close a tax loophole with IR35, but yesterday alone I had seven green cards notifying me of contact about it from my high-tech constituency. Many people who act as consultants for the IT industry enjoy substantial remuneration, but they may be tempted to move to other countries. If the industry was subject to wholesale relocation there could be consequent damaging effects.

Although I welcome the changes that have been made to improve the IR35 regulations, will my hon. Friend tell us whether the Department of Trade and Industry will provide a scheme to ensure that the information technology knowledge base is kept in this country?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks, especially in view of his distinguished professional career in the IT industry. I welcome his recognition of the fact that the Government have listened carefully to the views of that industry and many others, and have responded to them in the revised proposals that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has published. The new proposals provide the flexibility that is needed in the fast-growing IT sector, and are welcomed by many of his constituents and many IT contractors.

It is essential that we close a crude tax loophole that I am sure neither my hon. Friend nor his constituents would defend. That loophole enables a subcontractor earning £1,800 a week to avoid paying any national insurance contributions, whereas nurses, teachers or IT employees earning significantly less pay their fair share.

I can confirm that Inland Revenue officials are already working with the IT industry, and with my officials, to ensure that full consultation with the industry takes place while the guidance on the application of IR35 is prepared. I urge my hon. Friend and his constituents to work with the Revenue as it develops those guidelines.

Mr. MacShane: I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment as Europe's first E-Commerce Minister. It shows that we are not only in Europe, but running ahead of Europe.

May I suggest, before we are all invited to "get an e-life", that we dispense with the idea that putting "e" before everything solves all the problems? The Opposition Front Bench is clearly an e-rogenous zone, but that will not enable it to contribute to the debate on this subject.

As the IT revolution rolls out across the United Kingdom, there should be no red lining. As BT and other companies introduce ADSL and similar advanced e-commerce technology, that technology should be available throughout the UK, particularly in poorer areas such as South Yorkshire, and there should be no rich and poor IT or e-commerce Britain. Will the Minister ensure in her discussions with the telecommunications and IT companies that all British citizens have access to the e-commerce revolution?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks, and, indeed, for the kind remarks that he made on BBC Online about my appointment. He possibly meant to describe the Opposition Front Bench as an exogenous rather than an erogenous zone—but perhaps we should pass rapidly over that.

I entirely agree with what my hon. Friend said about the need to ensure that a digital divide does not open up between advantaged and disadvantaged areas. That is why, through our information society initiative, we have already established some 3,000 "IT for all" centres throughout the country, which anyone can use free of charge. It is also why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment recently announced the creation of nearly 1,000 ICT—information and communication technologies—learning centres in disadvantaged areas, so that everyone in every community can have full access to the benefits of the internet.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Is the Minister aware that, following changes to the Brussels convention, the then Parliamentary Secretary to the Lord Chancellor's Department said on 19 September:

"the prospect of having to defend cases in a foreign court could deter some businesses from making the most of e-commerce."

What did the Minister's Department do to stop those damaging changes?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that the Brussels convention has been in existence for 31 years. It governs private law disputes between, for instance, contracting parties, and simply provides that in a private law dispute between a consumer and a supplier the case may be heard in a court in the consumer's country. That is a clear and settled principle.

Of real importance to the development of electronic commerce is the e-commerce directive. The draft proposals provide—correctly, in my view—that, provided that a trader complies with the regulatory requirements of the country in which he is based, he can sell electronically to consumers in any other member state, and regulatory barriers cannot be put in his way according to the laws of the consumer's country. That proposal, which we strongly support, will ensure—provided that it is adopted; I hope that it will be adopted soon—that the European Union will indeed be a good place for electronic commerce.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The expansion of e-commerce requires a short and simple Bill.

The published draft Bill is too long and too heavy-handed. Of its four parts, only part II is necessary—the part relating to electronic signature. Indeed, that is all that the industry wants. Part III on interception should not be in the Bill at all. If the Bill is to be acceptable, part III should be removed. That is what we demand, and I predict that that is what we shall succeed in getting. Will the Minister now make a commitment to the House that she will remove part III altogether, so that we can get on with the rapid expansion of e-commerce without this cumbersome dog's dinner of a Bill?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman clearly belongs to the militant tendency of the Conservative party. I am not interested in listening to lectures or demands from a member of the party that wanted to impose mandatory key escrow on electronic commerce.

Perhaps I can reassure the House. Bill Gates and Microsoft have welcomed our draft electronic commerce Bill as a model for Europe. We shall introduce it shortly after the start of the new Session. We shall get it right and we shall get it soon. I shall reply, when I publish the Bill, to the extremely helpful responses that we have received during the consultation on the draft Bill.

National Minimum Wage

4. **Mr. Ivan Henderson** (Harwich): What research he has commissioned on the link between the introduction of the national minimum wage and levels of poverty. [95825]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): The latest results from the new earnings survey show that the introduction of the national minimum wage has removed the worst excesses of low pay. Coupled with the introduction of the working families tax credit, we expect literally millions of workers to be lifted out of poverty pay.

Mr. Henderson: Did that research cover seaside resorts with areas of high social deprivation such as the one that I represent? The Government's policies on the minimum wage, the working families tax credit and the new deal have started to raise families in my constituency out of poverty. Is that not the clear difference between this Government and the Conservative party, which offers no help and no hope to my constituents? The Labour party offers them self-help and self-confidence.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Those on the Opposition Front Bench have put on the record their views on the national minimum wage. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) called it a "cretinous idea"—he should know. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who leads for the Conservative party on this issue, said that she was fundamentally opposed to the introduction of a national minimum wage. That is still their position, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is the defining line between our two parties. We are in the mainstream of British politics; we are creating prosperity linked with compassion. By linking the national minimum wage and the working families tax credit, we shall lift literally millions of hard-working parents out of poverty to the benefit of themselves and their children.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I must apologise on behalf of the Secretary of State for that oversight. We all know that you are Madam Speaker, not Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I have been called worse.

Miss McIntosh: Does the Secretary of State agree that we do not need any research to prove that the introduction of the minimum wage, taken together with the increase in national insurance contributions, has put people the length and breadth of this country out of work and will lead to increases in poverty? What is the Government's answer to that?

Mr. Byers: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to respond to that point. The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), said that the introduction of the national minimum wage would cost millions of jobs. In reality, traditionally low-paid sectors, such as the retail and hotel and catering industries, have seen an increase in employment since the minimum wage was introduced. Those are the facts. I know that the hon. Lady, like most Conservative Members, would prefer dogma, rather than fact, to rule, but we shall not base our policies on prejudice. We shall do what is right for hard-working families.

Regional Development Funds

5. **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North–East Derbyshire): What representations he has received in response to proposals he has submitted to the European Union for Objective 2 funding. [95826]

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Caborn): My Department has received over 30 representations since submitting our proposals to the European Commission on the new United Kingdom objective 2 areas for 2000 to 2006. Two of the representations were from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Barnes: I welcome my good friend the Minister to his new position. Is he aware that—according to the index of local deprivation and the Coalfield Alliance's coalfield index—Holmewood, Hasland and Clay Cross, south in my constituency are areas of high deprivation, and that Wingerworth and Clay Cross, north are former coalfield areas? Is he also aware that north-east Derbyshire has lost 70 per cent. of its objective 2 funding? Does he agree that the loss of that funding is made even harder to bear by the fact that areas near us, in South Yorkshire, seem to be doing quite well in obtaining objective 1 status, and that other areas, in parts of the east midlands, have also received a good settlement? Will he re-examine the situation in north-east Derbyshire to determine whether a fresh case on objective 2 could be made to the European Commission?

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend, as I said, made two representations to the Department, and I responded in some detail to him on those. We have now responded

to requests covering 1.71 million people in the coalfield communities, and I am sure that he will appreciate that we have conducted the most extensive consultation in trying to ensure that, in implementing our regeneration strategy, all regeneration moneys—from the single regeneration budget, assisted area status, the new deal for communities, and structural funds—are used to deal comprehensively with any structural weaknesses. The Government have responded to 91 per cent. of the requests made by regional development agencies in the English regions. Indeed, 91 per cent. of north-east Derbyshire that has received objective 2 funding is covered by both the objective 2 submissions and the transitional arrangements.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Now that, for the first time in a generation, Britain has higher tax rates than Germany, does the Minister realise that the Government are rendering huge swathes of British business and economic life uncompetitive? Surely that fact will lead to a need for massive European assistance across Britain, and not only in the coalfield areas to which he referred.

Mr. Caborn: That does not accord with the facts. On Wednesday, 3 November, the business section of *The Journal*, a Tyneside newspaper, stated:

"Half of Tyneside manufacturing firms are reporting fuller order books than six months ago and their optimism about the future is growing. Eight out of 10 companies"—

Mr. Brady: What about Germany?

Mr. Caborn: These are the facts. The article states:

"Eight out of 10 companies expect both their domestic and export orders to rise or at least stay the same in the coming months, according to the latest TEC 200 Tyneside Economic Trends survey."

The article describes not a decline, but the first good news that north-east England has had for many years.

Small Businesses

6. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What programmes he has developed to assist people running small businesses in acquiring new skills. [95827]

The Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce (Ms Patricia Hewitt): My Department helps managers of small businesses to develop their skills through the network of Business Links, which provide companies with information and advice on management development and other training issues. The new Small Business Service that we are establishing will strengthen that work on skills by ensuring that we have first-class business support centres in every part of the United Kingdom. In particular, they will give very high priority to developing skills in e-commerce, so that all our small businesses are able to exploit fully the potential of the new information and communication technology.

Mr. Quinn: May I echo the congratulations to my hon. Friend on her new position? As she will know, the composition of many seaside economies is built on the bedrock of small businesses. May I have some assurances that constituencies such as my own will benefit from the regeneration opportunities available from developing the ideas that she has been describing?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. There is no doubt at all that small businesses, self-employment and small and growing enterprises play an enormously important part in regenerating disadvantaged areas. Two days ago, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and I published the report of the social exclusion unit's policy action team on enterprise in disadvantaged areas. I can assure my hon. Friend that the new Small Business Service, through the new franchised network of Business Links, will ensure that business support services are available to entrepreneurs and self-employed people in every part of the country, including disadvantaged areas such as his own.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): First, may I welcome to the Government Front Bench the new Ministers, many of whom appear to have moved from the Treasury? I hope that they will use that experience to stiffen the resolve of the Secretary of State—also a former Treasury Minister—as the DTI needs to take up a few issues with the Treasury on behalf of British business. The 13th report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on small business condemned the Secretary of State's regrettable habit of issuing potentially misleading information, and said:

"Much of the funding of the Small Business Service

—as referred to by the Minister—

"described in March 1999 as 'new money' has been subject to multiple announcement."

What is the exact figure of new funding for the SBS?

Ms Hewitt: We will respond fully to the Select Committee Report, and we are finalising the budget for the Small Business Service. We will be investing significantly more in small businesses across the country through the SBS than is currently invested through Business Links. Although the Business Links network that we inherited from the Conservatives was a significant improvement on what went before, it is not good enough for our small businesses. I hear repeatedly from small businesses and entrepreneurs that there is too much inconsistency and variation in quality across that network. We are determined to put that right with the creation of the new Small Business Service.

Mrs. Browning: No business person asked to give an account of the financial position of their business would be unable to answer a specific question such as the one I just asked the Minister, particularly as much of what the Secretary of State has said—which has been analysed by the Select Committee—is on the public record. If the Minister cannot give me an answer today, will she agree to write to me and give that figure? She will be aware that the report said that the Department had failed to publish clear figures relating to the small firms merit award for research and technology—the SMART fund—which, given her responsibilities within the Department, must be close to her heart. Exactly how much new money is in the SMART fund?

Ms Hewitt: I had the great pleasure recently of opening the business park at Nottingham-Trent university, where

three of the four companies incubated by the university are recipients of SMART fund awards. It is an excellent programme, and its evaluation has shown that it contributes significantly to high knowledge-based start-ups in this country. [HON. MEMBERS: "How much money?"] We will be responding in due course to the Select Committee report, and I will announce to the House the full details of the budget for the Small Business Service and the Business Links franchises.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Will my hon. Friend take account of the fact that probably the biggest single barrier to small businesses getting into e-commerce is the cost of getting on-line, and then the cost of local telephone calls? Will she pressurise the Director General of Oftel and the telecoms companies to put together packages to free small businesses from their fear that the meter will be running for 24 hours a day if they have e-commerce and proper links with the rest of the world?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an important point. There are a number of barriers preventing small businesses from going on-line, including the lack of skills and confidence. We are addressing that lack through the new local support centres which we are creating as part of the Business Links franchises. However, there is a problem with charges. Although internet access charges at weekends and evenings in this country are among the lowest in the world, the problem of metered charges for daytime, peak-hour access is undoubtedly a barrier, particularly to the small business user.

I recently met the Director General of Office of the Telecommunications, who confirmed that there is no regulatory barrier to BT introducing new tariff packages to provide cheap or completely unmetered local phone calls to heavy internet users in return for a flat-rate subscription. I am delighted to say that on Tuesday, the Prime Minister announced a new agreement with BT and several other telecommunications companies to provide such a package to further education colleges, citizens advice bureaux and libraries. I very much hope that BT will soon introduce a similar tariff package for other heavy internet users.

Rural Post Offices

7. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What plans he has to assist small rural post offices. [95828]

The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson): This Government are fully committed to the maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices. We will publish access criteria, which the new regulator will have a duty to monitor and which will aim to ensure that everyone in the United Kingdom has reasonable access to Post Office Counter services. We are making a substantial contribution to the costs of automating the counters network; and the performance and innovation unit in the Cabinet Office is carrying out an urgent study on the post office network. Rural post offices may also benefit from the various rate relief schemes mainly funded by Government and administered by local authorities.

Mr. Robathan: Does the Minister not appreciate the important role that sub-post offices play in rural areas, such as villages in my constituency? Is he aware that many rural post offices are facing closure? I recently visited Whetstone and Cosby in my constituency, where sub-post masters told me that they could not go on for much longer without their businesses closing. Is he aware of the damaging effect of the Government's abolition of the benefits card system, which exacerbates the problem? Given his background in the post office union, is he not ashamed of presiding over such a decline in rural sub-post offices?

Mr. Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is the man who put the hype into hyperbole. As someone who not only represented post office workers, but was a postman for 15 years, I understand the crucial importance of the rural post office network. It is no exaggeration to say that it is part of the country's social fabric. Post offices have closed; the number has decreased by almost 25 per cent. in the past 25 years. As Opposition Members know, the closures are usually due to an inability to find someone to take over. We are looking, for the first time, to set in legislation access criteria that will protect the post office network.

I remind the House that the Opposition's solution to the problem of retaining the rural post office network was to split the Post Office Counters network—from which 21 per cent. of income is derived—from the rest of the Post Office, leaving it completely separate. The rural post office network is safe in the Government's hands.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): As my hon. Friend said, post offices are crucial to rural areas. However, they should maintain a full range of services. Therefore, is not the guaranteed network system the best way to ensure that they will serve us well into the next century and provide the essential services that people in rural areas need?

Mr. Johnson: My hon. Friend is correct. I remind him of the terms of reference for the performance and innovation unit report on the post office network: to identify the contribution made by post offices to the vitality of local communities; to consider how best the post office network can contribute to the Government's objectives; and to formulate objectives for the post office network. I am taking over from my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) as chairman of the Horizon working group, whose specific job is to identify new areas of work and ensure that post offices can offer even better services to the communities that they serve.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Given that, in 2003, the average sub-post office will suffer a drop of 30 per cent. in its income because benefits will no longer be paid through post offices, we were extremely encouraged during the summer recess when, in response to the announcement that Camelot and the Post Office would act jointly in the next bid for the national lottery, the Secretary of State said that that would be a great help to rural sub-post offices. My understanding is that, under the current regulations, when Camelot puts a till, or a position—

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): A terminal?

Mrs. Browning: A terminal. I am always grateful for help from the hon. Gentleman, whose views I respect greatly.

I understand that Camelot looks for at least 3,000 transactions a week from a terminal in a sub-post office. What discussions took place between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport? Unless the rules have changed fundamentally, I am mystified as to how small sub-post offices will be helped.

Mr. Johnson: By 2001, we will have automated 19,000 post offices and 40,000 counters positions, and that will help us enormously. Post office counters are the biggest seller of lottery tickets in the country. We would like to extend that, and during our examination over the next couple of years we will consider how to get more terminals in more post offices so that there are more available to the rural public.

Mr. Hoyle: Will my hon. Friend consider helping rural post offices, as well as urban post offices, by opening a rural bank that may engage people who may not have been able to open an account in the past? That would ensure the long-term future of the post offices, by giving them new work and new moneys. I ask only for consideration to be given to that idea.

Mr. Johnson: We will consider that. It should be remembered that 65 per cent. of villages in this country have a post office, compared with only 5 per cent. with a bank. If we can automate the network and make it more user-friendly, we can help to preserve those post offices and the communities that they serve. One of the specific objectives of the current review is to extend to the financially excluded the opportunity to have bank accounts and all the advantages that go with them, so that they can draw their benefits either in cash or through an account.

National Minimum Wage

8. **Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): What representations he has received from voluntary organisations in respect of the operation of the national minimum wage. [95829]

The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson): My Department has received a considerable number of representations from voluntary organisations. Where appropriate, they have been passed to the independent Low Pay Commission, which is monitoring the national minimum wage.

Mr. Hammond: During the passage of the national minimum wage legislation, Conservative Members drew attention to some of the potential problems for voluntary organisations and volunteers. The Government rode roughshod over those concerns. Now that the legislation has bedded down and the Government can perhaps afford to be a little less paranoid, will the Minister acknowledge that there is a grey area where volunteering meets employment and that many voluntary organisations are still having difficulties with the legislation as it affects volunteers? Will the Minister ask the Low Pay Commission to conduct a review of the impact of the law on voluntary organisations, volunteers and people with disabilities?

Mr. Johnson: That is a legitimate area of concern. I am pleased that some Conservative Members have moved away from their outright opposition to the minimum wage and are considering some of the problems. The shadow Chancellor, however, said:

"Scrapping the national minimum wage is absolutely the first thing we would do within five minutes of getting through the door."

Far from riding roughshod over the representations that we received, we took them extremely seriously. Indeed, this March, we asked the independent Low Pay Commission to examine the situation, especially with therapeutic workers. We are now asking it to examine the matter again. The Low Pay Commission will consider the national minimum wage as it affects people right across the disability groups.

I want to counter the suggestion that somehow the national minimum wage is not in the interests of the disabled. The Association for Supported Employment said:

"Disabled workers have gained as much from the introduction of the minimum wage as have non-disabled."

The National League for the Blind and Disabled said:

"The minimum wage will ensure added security for our disabled members in employment."

There are areas for concern, but that should not detract from the enormous benefit that the national minimum wage has brought to all people in this country, especially the disabled.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): Does not all the evidence suggest that the minimum wage is a common-sense policy, good for the economy and good for working people? Did my hon. Friend notice that the Leader of the Opposition, speaking to the CBI this week, continued to characterise it as a burden and something that should be scrapped? What does he think the risks would be to ordinary working people if the Conservatives reversed the minimum wage?

Mr. Johnson: My hon. Friend makes an important point; under the previous Government 880,000 workers were paid less than £2.50 an hour. We were pleased to see that the first enforcement order for the national minimum wage was made last week on behalf of Mr. Aldred of Bognor Regis—ironically, he lives in the constituency of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb)—who was paid only £1.50 an hour.

I believe that there is a fundamental change in this country. People recognise that for the first time they have basic minimum civilised standards in the workplace, and a political party that tampers with that will do so at its peril. I have always believed that trying to explain social justice to Conservatives—or rather, to Her Majesty's Opposition, as I should call them—is rather like trying to explain origami to a penguin.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I think the Minister has misunderstood the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), which was about people who worked for voluntary organisations such as charities. There is a grey area; for instance, in my constituency people who volunteer to drive in and spend the morning in a charity shop have been receiving a small sum to help to pay for

their petrol. There is a perfectly genuine case for an inquiry. When will such an inquiry be set up, and when will we see a result?

Mr. Johnson: We do not believe that there is ambiguity. We made it clear that the definition of whether there is an entitlement to the national minimum wage is whether there is a contract of employment. We do not intend to allow a low-paid ghetto to develop around the voluntary sector. We have excluded voluntary workers from the national minimum wage when they are genuine volunteers in complete control of their time, without a contract of employment, and we do not intend to go further than that.

Small Businesses

9. **Mr. Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What plans he has to improve access to business information, advisory and support services for small businesses. [95830]

The Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce (Ms Patricia Hewitt): May I congratulate my hon. Friend on single-handedly saving the small business in his constituency that leads the world in the production of vellum? As he knows, we are in the process of establishing the new Small Business Service, which will deliver a number of services nationally and establish a network of franchises to deliver high-quality world-class business support for small and medium-sized enterprises in every part of the country. The new Small Business Service will be established by April 2000, and the network of local franchises will be up and running by April 2001.

Mr. White: The Minister will be aware that the people running small businesses do not have the time to go and see what is happening in other firms and other industries. Will she assure the House that the Small Business Service will be proactive and go out and give examples of good practice, especially concerning the opportunities provided by the internet? People who run small businesses may not be aware of those, because they are too busy getting on with their job.

Ms Hewitt: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. Indeed, I recently launched at the DTI a new interactive benchmarking service to enable any self-employed person, sole trader or small business that is on-line to use the benchmarking service that helps to spread best practice among SMEs.

At the heart of the Small Business Service will be a single gateway—an electronic network of databases providing information, knowledge and interactive services, which will be accessible by SMEs both directly and indirectly, through the telephone, through local Business Links or trade associations, or through a private sector support organisation.

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): In view of a comment the Minister made earlier, will the service be truly accessible to the smallest businesses? Given the comments she has just made about quality, it is important that business advisers should be accredited and properly trained. As many hon. Members will know, in the past, people have set themselves up as business advisers with poor qualifications and no real ability to advise.

Ms Hewitt: I agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman raises, but I am sure that he will agree that there are some outstanding personal business advisers working in the Business Links network. However, the quality of the Business Links service is patchy around the country and we will make it clear in the bidding guidance for the new franchise areas that we expect to see proper training and development, as well as the use of accreditation services for the new Business Links franchise services. We are determined to ensure that the best possible business support services are available in every part of the country to all our small business community.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): What assessment has been made of those small businesses that fail because of the inadequate financial management expertise of their proprietors? Can the Minister assure the House that Government Departments will not be over-zealous in claiming VAT, income tax and national insurance payments when a company has cash-flow problems and that no Government Department will force a small business into bankruptcy when other creditors are confident that, given time, the company may trade out and become profitable?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue, because too many owner-managers and self-employed people do not have the basic financial skills that are needed to run an efficient and successful small business. Therefore, part of the service that will be provided through the Business Links franchises will support those people in gaining those basic financial skills. As I am sure that he will be aware, we are reviewing bankruptcy law, in co-operation with the Treasury, to ensure that businesses that could be managed through a period of difficulty into survival and subsequent success are given the chance to achieve that.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I welcome my good friend and constituency neighbour to the Front Bench. I also welcome the measures taken so far to help small and medium-sized enterprises by the Government, including the Small Business Service. Can my hon. Friend reassure me that that service will be able to help the microbusinesses—the one-man or one-woman bands—that are so numerous in parts of the midlands? When I last had a proper job, before May 1997, I was an accountant for many such organisations and I know what difficulties they have in grappling with the regulatory burden and updating their trading skills. Will she focus on that issue?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I can certainly assure him that the new Business Links franchise in Leicestershire, as in other parts of the country, will meet the needs of small businesses of all sizes and different stages of development, including the pre start-up or start-up phase through to the high-growth potential companies. The electronic network of information and knowledge to which I referred a moment ago will make it much easier

and more cost effective for Business Links franchises to provide high-quality support to the self-employed and sole trader as well as the more intensive support that is needed by the high-growth potential companies which have in the past tended to be the clients on which Business Links have focused.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Would not the greatest service that the Government could give to small businesses be to respect their overwhelming opposition to British entry into the single currency? According to the latest ICM poll, that view is shared by 64 per cent. of the population.

Ms Hewitt: I wondered how long it would be before we heard the true anti-European voice of the modern, extremist Conservative party. Given that half our trade is with our fellow European Union members, withdrawal from the EU would be a disaster for our business community, small and large.

I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman was going to congratulate the Government on the fact that there have been more business start-ups this year than last year. More small businesses are surviving, fewer are failing, and we have reversed the 1992 situation, when start-ups hit their lowest level in recent years.

Oil and Gas Industry Task Force

10. **Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen, South): What plans he has for further work by the oil and gas industry task force. [95832]

The Minister for Energy and Competitiveness in Europe (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The oil and gas industry task force will move into a new phase in January 2000 to drive forward the initiatives announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in September, when he visited the offshore engineering conference in Aberdeen.

It is crucial that the momentum created by the very successful task force is not lost. The task force will continue to identify actions, but much of its activity from now on will be to concentrate on the implementation of the conclusions that it has already reached.

Miss Begg: I am very glad to hear what my right hon. Friend says. I also attended September's exhibition in Aberdeen, so I know that the report from the oil and gas industry task force—which was delivered in quick time—was very well received by the industry. For the first time, oil companies, service companies and contractors are working with the Government and trade unions to find solutions and produce ideas. That work will make sure that the UK continental shelf continues to produce oil and to contribute to the economy of Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland for years to come.

Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that she will continue the work of chairing the task force which was begun by her predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), who is now the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office? I wish her well in that task, and hope that the economic well-being of the north-east of Scotland, which stems from the oil and gas industry, will continue.

Mrs. Liddell: That is a very important point. By its very nature, the shape of the oil and gas industry in the North sea is subject to change. It is therefore very important that the companies involved in the UK continental shelf concentrate on maintaining their global position. The oil and gas industry task force is a classic example of how the Government, working with industry, can address the problems of change in that industry. As a result of the task force's work, it has been identified that an additional 100,000 jobs can be created in a critically important industry that employs a third of a million people throughout the United Kingdom.

I shall certainly continue to chair the task force and follow the excellent example of my predecessor. From January on, at the request of the industry, the task force will be renamed Pilot, and will concentrate on the new initiatives required for the future.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I welcome the greater awareness of the working of the industry that the Government have gained as a result of the work of the task force and the industry. I hope that the Minister will use that understanding to recognise the important part played by those of my constituents whose services are contracted to the industry.

Will the right hon. Lady use that understanding to make it clear to the Treasury and to the Department of Social Security that those people are not all tax scroungers? They are merely adapting to the modern industry in a flexible way to make it competitive in the world market, and to that end are accepting cuts in income. Will she recognise the damage done by the Government when they failed to recognise that flexibility in the IR35 consultation?

Mrs. Liddell: I am well aware of the hon. Gentleman's interest in the oil and gas industry, and of the position of contractors. I know too that some tensions have arisen. Some contractors behave totally honourably and legitimately and fulfil their obligations to the Exchequer in the proper manner, but others do not.

However, it is of particular interest to contractors that we develop an effective supply chain for the oil industry. Indeed, when I launched Logic, the supply chain initiative, in September, it was recognised that the future of the contracting industry depended on an adequate supply chain. The development of technology also depends on a good link between the big players and the smaller contractors.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 8 NOVEMBER—Conclusion of consideration of Lords amendments to the Greater London Authority Bill.

Supplemental allocation of time motion followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Food Standards Bill.

TUESDAY 9 NOVEMBER—Supplemental allocation of time motion followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

WEDNESDAY 10 NOVEMBER—Until 2 o'clock, there will be the usual debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the House of Lords Bill.

THURSDAY 11 NOVEMBER—The House will be prorogued when Royal Assent to all Acts has been signified.

The House may also be asked to consider any Lords amendments that may be received.

Sir George Young: The House is grateful for next week's business. Will the right hon. Lady tell us whether there will be oral questions on Thursday, the planned date of prorogation?

Clearly, the Government have a lot of business to complete in the few days that remain of this Session. On Monday and Tuesday of this week, the House finished its business early. We are now confronted with significant congestion, with guillotine after guillotine on important Bills and hundreds of amendments to the badly drafted Greater London Authority Bill. Would it not have been common sense to take the House of Lords Bill on Monday and Tuesday of this week to minimise the rush and chaos next week?

What statements are planned by the right hon. Lady's colleagues? We know that the Chancellor will be making a statement on Tuesday when, hopefully, he will respond to the case made by the road transport industry and get off the fuel escalator. When will we have a proper debate on that statement and on today's damaging Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, which shows that taxes are rising faster here than anywhere else in Europe?

Will the Home Secretary be making a statement on fox hunting to clarify the confusion there? Will the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food be bringing us up to date with progress in lifting the ban on British beef?

We will have completed this Session without the usual defence debate, without a debate on the royal commission on long-term care, without the usual small business debate and with the Government in growing disarray on tax, welfare, beef and hunting, and with their programme in this House in a shambles. In Parliament, this has been not a year of delivery but a year of disaster.

Mrs. Beckett: Whether there will be oral questions on Thursday will depend on the progress of business. It is a matter that can be discussed through the usual channels.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the House rising early and the handling of the Greater London Authority Bill. I accept that there is a substantial number of Government amendments to the Bill, but, as he is well aware, many are in response to concerns that were properly aired and considered in this place, which I am afraid is in no way unprecedented. The right hon. Gentleman also asked about statements planned. It was not clear to me whether he was pressing for fewer statements so that there would be more time to consider amendments, or for extra statements.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Both.

Mrs. Beckett: That is typical. In other words, whatever one does not get, one will complain about.

As to what is planned, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) is correct to say that the Chancellor is to make the pre-Budget statement on 9 November, as has already been announced to the House. We will endeavour to keep to a minimum the number of other statements because we believe that that will be helpful to the management of the House and to Members' expectations. There will be a debate on the issues raised by the pre-Budget statement in the debates to follow the Queen's Speech, but the right hon. Gentleman knows that it would be unusual to have a debate immediately after it.

It is not accurate to say, as the Conservative party and the right hon. Gentleman have said, that the OECD report shows that taxes in the United Kingdom are now rising faster than elsewhere in Europe. From memory, I think that nine countries have a higher tax burden than ours. On anyone's measurement, the tax ratio in this country is lower than the Conservatives predicted in their pre-election projections for the handing of our financial affairs. The only way in which the Conservative party can even begin to support the nonsense that its members speak about tax is to include the windfall tax, which funds the new deal, and which is consequently extremely popular.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): It is still a tax.

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, it is, but most people would not feel it valid to include it in the figures in the way that the Conservatives choose to do.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the Home Secretary would make a statement about how fox hunting will be handled, and my right hon. Friend will make such an announcement when he is ready to do so. The right hon. Gentleman also mentioned my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; he will know that discussions continue—

Mr. Forth: It's a shambles.

Mrs. Beckett: The shambles happened when the Conservative party presided over the BSE crisis. Unlike Conservative Members, we have resolved the problem rather than boasting about resolving it while utterly failing to do so. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has consistently kept the House informed and I am sure that all hon. Members will recognise how meticulously he has done so.

The right hon. Gentleman was right to say that we have not yet debated the Defence White Paper. As has been explained, that is a consequence of the changes required following events in Kosovo. I have told the right hon. Gentleman that I expect an announcement. The Department of Health has said that it hopes to say something about long-term care before Christmas, and I will be happy to schedule a debate on that matter when I can do so.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the lack of the usual small business debate. In fact, that debate was an innovation introduced by the Government.

I completely dismiss the right hon. Gentleman's general comments. This has not been an easy Session; it was never going to be so, given our determination to finish business that has been outstanding for 88 years, namely reform of the House of Lords. We shall complete that business.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Will the Leader of the House initiate a debate, perhaps in the next Session, on the economic situation in the north-east of England? Only this week, 400 jobs have been lost at the last mine to close—Ellington colliery. In the new year, a power station will close with the loss of 300 jobs, and 100 jobs are going at Blyth harbour. Down the road, at Spennymoor, 100 jobs are being lost in the tobacco industry. The situation in the north-east is serious. We seem to be haemorrhaging jobs, but nothing is being done.

Mrs. Beckett: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. News of job losses is always unpleasant, no matter in what industry they occur, and it is particularly difficult when several announcements come together. My hon. Friend will know that the Government try to assist in areas where that happens. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) has secured a debate on the coal industry next Wednesday morning. The Government's action on the economy is designed to achieve steady and sustainable growth so that we can deal with issues, such as that which my hon. Friend raises, as they arise. In the debates on the Queen's Speech, we will have an opportunity to focus on a range of issues, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will take the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Leader of the House recall that the Labour party, in its manifesto, said—on the basis of discussions with the Liberal Democrats—that it was committed to reforming the business of the House in order to avoid the sort of nonsense that we face over the next seven days? Does she agree that the lack of any attention to real priority in the organisation of business this week, and the inadequate time that has therefore been allowed for important legislation—not least on matters of concern raised by those on her Back Benches—gives the lie to the idea that any modernisation of the business of the House has truly taken effect? She said that this was an exceptional Session. Can she guarantee that this time next year, we will not have the ludicrous brinkmanship from which we are suffering now?

Mrs. Beckett: I presume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the behaviour of the House of Lords. He talks about a lack of attention being given to priority, but the Government have taken great care in handling priority issues. He suggests that there has been insufficient time, but the record of our debates shows that all the issues that we have still to resolve have received many hours of scrutiny both here and in the House of Lords. I fear that such a backlog or traffic jam at the end of a Session is a feature of our present parliamentary system. That was particularly likely to happen this year, largely because of the time that the Lords spent on the House of Lords Bill. I do not attack that, because it is perfectly acceptable, sensible and reasonable for the House of Lords to spend considerable time discussing its future. The time spent on that has taken time from what would usually have been available for the Government's legislative programme. If one includes the 15 hours in the Privileges Committee, 165 hours were spent on debating Lords reform, of which 111 hours were on the Bill itself. That would have made a serious hole in the time available for discussing any Government's programme, and it has had a knock-on effect. The hon. Gentleman talked about the staging of business this week, but we can only deal with such matters when they come back from the Lords.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Has the Leader of the House studied the report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Kosovo, which shows that people lack food? Given next week's busy timetable, will she ensure that, if there is no opportunity to discuss it in the House, the appropriate Department will take the lead in ensuring that the cut in food aid, which will cause starvation in Kosovo, is reversed before the aid donors meeting on 17 November?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend has taken a great interest in affairs in Kosovo, has studied the matter closely and undertaken a visit. I am grateful to him for telling me that he might raise the issue. I understand that the Department for International Development is considering the issues in Pristina that he raises, is endeavouring to assess the consequences of the problems that he has identified and will write to him shortly.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Given that the Greater London Authority Bill came out of Committee at the end of March but that the Government did not choose to bring it back for Report and Third Reading until May, despite having had 13 years to consider the legislation, is it fair that Londoners should be asked to take this mountain of amendments in less than two days at the end of the Session?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Bill came out of Committee in March, but he knows that one outcome of the Committee was that the Government undertook to take on board a great many issues raised there. He also knows that it is a substantial Bill that changes the structure not only of London government but of London transport and other matters. If we compare the time taken on the Bill with that taken on legislation less than a third of its size in, for example, the early 1990s, it is clear that reasonable time has been allotted. No one is happy about so many amendments coming so late, but he is well aware that many are technical. With regard to the time that we have had to consider the matter, he knows better than most that no one spends all their time thinking about a legislative

[Mrs. Beckett]

programme the details of which we may be able to consider only two or three years into a Parliament. However, the principles underlying the Bill have been well considered and are being effected.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Does the Leader of the House agree that the World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle this month is of enormous importance to the economy and environment of the United Kingdom and globally? Does she further agree that there is increasing public concern about the powers and responsibilities of the WTO and its influences on our everyday life, and that there is little debate and scrutiny of its activities in this House? Will she find time in the near future to debate the implications of the conference in Seattle? If that leads to a new millennium round of trade negotiations, there needs to be a permanent mechanism of scrutiny of the negotiations in the House.

Mrs. Beckett: I entirely share my hon. Friend's view that the trade negotiations in Seattle are extremely important and that the role of the WTO is of great importance and increasingly recognised as such. I agree that it is important to get the balance right, although I take the view that there is merit and benefit for all in an expansion of free trade. My hon. Friend is right to say that the issues are among the many important issues that we do not always find enough time to consider in the House. I remind him, as I reminded someone last week, that we shall be expanding the opportunities for debate with the Westminster Hall meetings in the forthcoming Session, and my hon. Friend may think it worth raising the work of the WTO there. However, I cannot share my hon. Friend's view that we can readily find time to introduce some permanent mechanism for scrutiny of what happens at the WTO over and above that available for scrutiny of Department of Trade and Industry responsibilities.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the right hon. Lady acknowledge that the speed at which taxes are rising is giving rise to great concern? Will she ensure that the Chancellor deals with that issue head on in his statement on Tuesday?

Mrs. Beckett: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's analysis, as he will know, but he can be pretty confident—

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): It is an independent report, not government spin doctoring.

Mrs. Beckett: No, the OECD analysis refers to some relatively out-of-date figures—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says sotto voce that I have not read it, but he clearly has not read it or he would know that the OECD report itself recognises that it refers to figures that are out of date. I think I am right in saying that it uses calendar years rather than financial years, so there is a different basis of analysis, and the OECD makes an important caveat. I expect that Opposition Members do not even know that the OECD has said that the figures that it has produced should not be used to make incautious and invalid comparisons.

In answer to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), I am confident that he can expect my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to deal with these issues in his pre-Budget report, if only because I anticipate that the hon. Gentleman will seek to raise them then.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Will my right hon. Friend use all her influence to arrange for a statement on the recent High Court decision to award compensation to Spanish trawler men? It is yet another example of how Tory hostility to Europe backfires on the British people, not least former trawler men in constituencies such as mine, and in Grimsby, Hull and Fleetwood, who are fighting their own campaign for compensation for the loss of their jobs. There is considerable passion about the issue in my area. Since the High Court decision, I have received some 200 letters about it, so I hope that my right hon. Friend can arrange for a statement.

Mrs. Beckett: I am not sure that I can undertake to find time for an early statement, but I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes and her strength of feeling and that of her constituents. However, she is uncharacteristically over-generous to the Conservative party. It was not only its hostility to the European Union but its incompetence as a Government that led to the decision to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Does not the right hon. Lady herself make the point that there is a strong case for a debate on tax, so that we can have a full debate on the whole matter rather than discussing the selective points that she makes? Is she suggesting that an organisation as reputable as the OECD is in the habit of issuing out-of-date reports, based on invalid statistics? Should we not hold a full debate to assess whether we have the fastest rising tax burden in Europe?

Mrs. Beckett: One reason why the OECD is reputable is because it is careful to publish accurate information. The OECD does not say what Conservative Members claim—they have clearly read their lines, but not the OECD report.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate in Government time on the climate change levy before the Government conclude their consultations with industry on that matter, and announce the final shape of the levy? Such a debate would allow all parts of the House to contribute—or to make a final contribution—to the consultation process, and to discuss the persuasive argument that the levy should be flexible enough to distinguish between those sections of manufacturing industry that have been responsible and have reduced energy use, and those that have not.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend will have to forgive me, as I cannot immediately recall when the consultation period on the levy ends. However, I can certainly tell him that, as he is aware, in the coming days, there will be opportunities to raise a range of issues. I am sure that he will take the opportunity—as will others—to raise that matter and ensure that it is aired. Even if we are close to

the end of the consultation period, he will know that all Governments sensibly take into account the comments and advice that they receive.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate, or for a statement to be made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, early next week, so that we can discuss the Minister's incompetence in giving way to the French, when we had the law and the science on our side? Why did he have to give further concessions to the French? Those concessions are now leading to problems with the negotiations with the Germans. Will he also tell us when he will lift the beef on the bone ban?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry that I cannot undertake to find time for my right hon. Friend to make a further statement on that issue during the next few days, although, of course, if he has a major announcement to make, no doubt he will do so. However, I fear that the hon. Gentleman is whistling in the wind; most people recognise the extreme competence—*[Interruption.]* I have read the comments of the National Farmers Union, and very forthright they are. For example, Ben Gill stated:

"I do not believe that the timetable we have been looking at for the lifting of the ban has been knocked off course. I am not unhappy with this outcome."

The NFU complains that some Conservative Members are trying to use farmers' experience in order to make a party political point, and it attacks those Members for doing so.

I realise that such a debate will give the Government and my right hon. Friend a chance to remind the House of the incompetence of the Conservatives and the success that he has enjoyed, but he might become swollen-headed if we give him many more such opportunities.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the extra 1.1 million homes recommended for the south-east of England is not Government policy, but merely advice from a panel of inspectors? Will she also confirm that hon. Members will have ample opportunity in the House to raise the concerns of their constituents before the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions reaches his decision, and that they will not need to engage in the cheap, hypocritical point scoring that we heard from Conservative Members yesterday evening?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. Most people who have carefully followed these issues are well aware that the report was not produced by the Government; it was a report to the Government, which the Government will consider and upon which they will pronounce. He is also right to point out that there will be many opportunities for the House to consider the issues raised in the report. It is most important that we do so sensibly—not based on the scare stories put about by the Conservatives.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Given the damning indictment by the OECD report, drawing attention to the fact that, in the first full year of the Labour Government, we saw the biggest tax increase for 16 years, will the Leader of the House please arrange for the First Lord of the Treasury to explain to the House why, according to *The Times*, he told my right hon. Friend, the Leader of the Opposition, on 10 March, that

"We have not raised taxes, we have cut them."?

Mrs. Beckett: We have dealt with that issue several times. My right hon. Friend comes to the House every week, so the hon. Gentleman will no doubt endeavour to raise the matter on one of those occasions—unless, in the meantime, he reads the OECD report, in which case, he probably will not.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): May I press the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) raised about the World Trade Organisation? In yesterday's Question Time, the WTO was discussed with the Secretary of State for International Development. We have had many oral and written questions and three early-day motions, but we have not had a debate on that important subject. Given that the WTO is due to meet in Seattle on 30 November and that there are massive problems with international trade and the third world, could we have a debate before 30 November?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. He might find an opportunity to raise those issues in and around the debates that take place in the new Session. I cannot undertake to provide time for a special debate, although I recognise the importance of his point, and will draw it to the attention of my Cabinet colleagues.

Mr. Bercow: May we have a full day's debate in Government time next week on the Prime Minister's astonishing determination to drag Britain into joining the euro, with a cost that he will not calculate, for a benefit that he cannot quantify, and at a risk to the self-government of the British people that he dare not admit? Does the right hon. Lady accept that the merit of having such a debate now is all the greater because a recent ICM poll, wisely commissioned by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), showed that 64 per cent. of British people oppose entry to the euro? Should not the Prime Minister open a full day's debate in the House and explain his minority extremism, as opposed to the majority common sense of the British people?

Mrs. Beckett: I am tempted to say "no" and sit down, but that would be unfair on the hon. Gentleman, who regularly attends these enjoyable occasions. I shall therefore simply say that I see no call for a full day's debate, let alone in Government time, on the euro in the near future. The Government's approach is quite clear and has been for a long time: we shall act in the national interest. When we judge that it is in the national interest to enter the euro, we shall put the case to the British people and they will make the decision.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate on the way in which planning applications are considered? Those of my constituents who support the excellent work of the Shaftesbury campaign against McDonald's and who live close to the site where a new takeaway restaurant is planned for the west Harrow part of my constituency are

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

understandably extremely concerned that, because the restaurant is being built on the site of a former public house, it does not require a high level of detailed planning consideration. Given the impact on my constituents and on the excellent Whitmore high school nearby, can I persuade my right hon. Friend to make time for such a debate?

Mrs. Beckett: I understand how great concern can be caused within a constituency when planning issues are being considered, particularly if people feel that the development will have a substantial impact on the quality of their lives. I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a special debate in the House on the matter, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will use his ingenuity to raise it. May I recommend to him the opportunities for debate that will arise in Westminster Hall?

Mr. Forth: The Leader of the House could not possibly—could she—be seeking to avoid a debate on the OECD report? Does she recall the tax bombshell, which turned out to have a much longer fuse than many of us imagined? Now that the facts are in the public domain, however, and an authoritative, impartial source has clearly established that tax levied by this Government has increased and is continuing to increase, surely it is in the Government's interest to set the matter right and to give the House an opportunity to consider it properly? The Government could then set out their version of events and my colleagues and I could explore the OECD's authoritative and impartial account of the steep and continuing rise in taxation on the people and businesses of this country.

Mrs. Beckett: No, I am not worried in the slightest about having such a debate. Indeed, many of my right hon. and hon. Friends would look forward to such an event with considerable relish. We all enjoy contrasting the Conservative party's record of economic management with that of the Government and the Chancellor. However, I fear that we must be denied that treat, at least in the near future, although there will no doubt be an economic debate in the aftermath of the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is it not a matter of regret that the House has never debated the scandal of the mis-selling of endowment mortgages? Requests for such a debate were made 10 months ago at business questions and have been made repeatedly since, and the matter was raised in early-day motion 881.

[*That this House is alarmed at the evidence published in Financial Adviser and The Sunday Times that reveals that more than two million people may have been mis-sold endowment mortgages; notes that leading independent financial advisers stress that endowment mortgages have been unsuitable for virtually everyone for the past 10 years; regrets that the Personal Investment Authority/Financial Services Authority have not already acted despite evidence of widespread mis-selling revealed by the recent mystery shopper exercises by the Consumers' Association and Suffolk Trading Standards; and calls on the Treasury and FSA to launch an immediate investigation into mis-selling and urges them to consider outlawing endowment mortgages, as the United States has done, and to further consider whether compensation should be paid to those who have suffered financial losses.*]

Is it not a matter of regret that the House has never debated the scandal of the mis-selling of endowment mortgages? This month, a half a million victims of endowment mis-selling will be told that their premiums must be substantially increased. It is clear that 4 million endowment mortgages have been sold in the interests of the sellers not the purchasers, because they attract up to seven times more commission than repayment mortgages. Is it not right that we should consider this matter? It is commendable that the Government are drawing attention to this scandal, but at the moment they are only barking, and they should now show us that they are determined to bite.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend refers to an issue that has become more clear over the past year. He correctly said that this problem was flagged up much earlier, but the picture was not clear until more recently. There was a mortgage summit last Friday, and the Government are considering, in discussions with the industry, what action should be taken. I cannot undertake to find time for a special debate on the issue in the near future, but I shall draw his comments to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Evans: Is not one of the reasons why we have one of the fastest-growing tax burdens wasteful Government expenditure? Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made on the future of the Government's annual report? There have been only two editions, and 100,000 copies of the most recent edition were printed but only 8,000 were sold. The Government bought 41,000 copies, and are now prepared to buy the remaining 51,000. That is the clearest example of vanity publishing. It is usually the author who picks up the tab, but, in this case, it is the taxpayer. Will she arrange for a statement to be made, so that this publication can cease to be published?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue of wasteful Government expenditure, as it is a matter on which we certainly ought to have, and probably will have, debates in the future. The Conservative party has attacked as wasteful and extravagant the Government's expenditure on the health service, education, the national minimum wage and other matters of much greater interest to the British people than expenditure on the annual report. As for it being a classic example of vanity publishing, I cannot recall the exact figures, but I think that I am right in saying that between 10,000 and 20,000 copies were sold to the general public. If the hon. Gentleman wants an example of what he calls vanity publishing, and one that involved greater cost and less interest, I recommend to him the previous Government's White Paper on competitiveness, which cost about three times as much and sold far fewer copies.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Next week is very congested, but is it possible to squeeze in a statement by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—I appreciate that we have just had Trade and Industry Questions—about the objective 2 structural funds and the map that was submitted by the British Government to the European Commission last month? It unfortunately

contained an error in that two of the most deprived wards in my constituency were omitted because of a cock-up and an oversight by the regional development agency, which did not consult my authority before submitting the map to the Government office for the north-west. That has enormous ramifications for my area. The European Commission is due to make a pronouncement this month, so the matter is urgent. If we could have such a statement, that would greatly please me, and my hon. Friends who have experienced the same problem.

Mrs. Beckett: Despite my hon. Friend's blandishments, I fear that I cannot undertake to squeeze in such a statement next week. As he said, the report is before the Commission. He raises an important and serious point, and I undertake to draw it to the attention of the Secretary of State, who will no doubt be in touch with my hon. Friend about it.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Rural areas are suffering from the underfunding of public services. The fire service in Shropshire is underfunded by 46 per cent., and the local authority will therefore have to spend more than its standard spending assessment allows.

A recent report by independent experts, commissioned by the Home Office, recommended that sparsity should be taken into account in the distribution of police forces. We have the lowest ratio of policemen to population in western Europe, yet it is proposed that 36,000 new houses should be built in Shropshire. We want houses for the purposes of indigenous growth, but there must be a full debate on the impact of those building plans on publicly funded services that are already stretched to the limit.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government are indeed very concerned about the position in rural areas, and that they have taken steps to try to reduce some of the difficulties that became so severe under the Government whom he supported. He will know that we have introduced rate relief for village shops and post offices, invested substantial extra money—£170 million—in rural transport, given extra help to small rural schools, and increased spending on conservation and rural development. He will also know that the Government are committed to introducing a rural White Paper. We are not saying that all problems experienced in rural areas can be overcome overnight, but those developments show that the Government are aware of the difficulties, and are taking steps to redress them.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Is the Leader of the House aware that, in October 1998, I asked whether we ought to have a debate on, in particular, the centrality of biotechnology to the Government's science policy—

Mr. Swayne: I remember!

Mr. McWalter: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that.

When I asked my question, I bore in mind the fact that real dangers would arise in regard to genetically modified crops and other such matters. I asked a similar question in June. In 1998, the Leader of the House said that such matters were of great importance. She also said that she could not promise me an early debate, and, in that respect, she has been as good as her word. Every hon. Member is now aware of the seriousness and importance of those matters. Will the Leader of the House, 13 months on, try to make room for a Government initiative?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the spirit in which he raised this matter, and for his recognition of the accuracy of what I said to him. I fear that I still cannot undertake to find time for a debate, but I commend to him the sittings in Westminster Hall, and remind him that Cabinet Office questions will take place on Wednesday, when he may find an opportunity to raise the matter again.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The Leader of the House may be aware that parents of vaccine-damaged children came to the House yesterday to make representations to Members about their financial plight. She may recall that, under the last Labour Administration, the Vaccine Damage Act 1979 was passed, providing for compensation for parents of children who had suffered 80 per cent. brain damage or more. I am sure that she will agree that a £40,000 one-off payment is hardly sufficient compensation for the lifelong injury that those children suffered. Can she assure me that, at some stage, the Government will find time to revisit that earlier legislation—passed, I think, with the agreement of all Members—and to provide an equitable arrangement for parents and the children whom they care for?

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a debate in the near future, but I will draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. I think the hon. Gentleman will find that debates about the handling of health care are due to take place in the coming week; he may have an opportunity to raise the matter then, or doing debates on the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): May we have an early debate on the promotion of this country abroad, and, in particular, on the work of the British Council? In that context, could we find time to congratulate Mr. Stephen Shaw of the British Council on achieving such high international status that he is recognised more widely than the Leader of the Opposition? Could we perhaps arrange a job swap between Mr. Shaw and the Leader of the Opposition, which would enable the British Council to raise its profile in the House of Commons, and enable the Leader of the Opposition to raise his profile abroad?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. All Members from all sides of the House very much value the work of the British Council, and I heartily congratulate Mr. Stephen Shaw. I am not sure what message my hon. Friend's question holds for the future of the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He has to worry about a job swap with Michael Portillo.

Mrs. Beckett: I hear my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) talk about a job swap. Indeed, that may be in the Leader of the Opposition's future stars, but not in those of Mr. Shaw.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Has the right hon. Lady read the OECD report on taxation,

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

because her remarks about it did not give me the impression that she had? Will she give the House an honest answer? If we cannot have the debate on taxation that we so evidently need to clarify the position, can we have a debate on honesty in government so that we can probe the Prime Minister on what he meant when he said before the election

"We have no plans to increase taxes at all."?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was made perfectly well aware of the Government's plans when they made their announcements before the general election. We made it plain that we would not raise the rate of income tax and that we would not raise the higher rate of income tax. It is very dishonest of Conservative Members to pretend that we have increased them.

Mr Evans: What about honesty?

Mrs. Beckett: I am about to come to that. Like the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), I believe in honesty in politics and I am perfectly prepared to answer his question. I have read a very thorough and clearly more detailed summary of the report than that seen by Conservative Members.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I was slightly surprised that my right hon. Friend's business statement did not refer to the ping-pong match which, I understand from the media, we are going to play with the other House next week. Have the Government any contingency plans to ensure that, if such a match takes place, the democratic will of this Chamber will win and that we shall not see demob unhappy hereditary peers trying to impose their will on the people of this nation?

Mrs. Beckett: Although we do not use media descriptions such as ping-pong match, the phrase in the business statement

"The House may also be asked to consider any Lords amendments which may be received"

covers such an eventuality.

I hope that all Members accept the supremacy of this elected House. The purpose of the House of Lords is to scrutinise, consider, advise and put a different point of view on some of the issues raised. That is right and proper. However, this House is elected and that is where final decisions should rest. As for contingency plans, I suppose that that is how one could describe our consideration of the House of Lords Bill on Wednesday.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Is the Leader of the House aware that, according to Government figures in the Treasury Red Book, the share of national income that the Government take in tax has increased from 37 to 41 per cent? That is equivalent to an extra £36 billion a year. Will she arrange for the appropriate Minister to explain to the House why, in the last week alone, two constituents have written to me to say that they have life-threatening heart conditions, but, after months of waiting, they still cannot obtain a firm date for the operation that they need? Can we have a debate about that?

Mrs. Beckett: That is a classic example of the muddled thinking that seems to be so prevalent among Conservative Members. The hon. Gentleman lambasts the Government for, he says, raising too much money in taxation, while calling for more spending on the health service. It is time that the Conservative party sorted itself out and worked out which argument it is putting.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Not surprisingly, the right hon. Lady refused Conservative Members a debate on the Government's increase in taxation. Therefore, before the pre-Budget statement next week, will she make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to come clean with the British people? Despite what she said in her answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), the Prime Minister promised that he would not increase taxes "at all". We see from the OECD report today that Britain now has the fastest rising taxes. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said to the Prime Minister yesterday, this Government not only increase taxes by stealth, but they are stealthy when it comes to telling the truth.

Mrs. Beckett: First, I remind the hon. Lady that I did not refuse a debate, but refused to undertake to find time next week for such a debate. I also pointed out that there would be opportunities for such debate in the aftermath of the Queen's Speech, and, undoubtedly, also on other occasions. Secondly—on the nonsense of pretending that the Government somehow misled the British people—as I have already pointed out several times today, the only way in which Conservative Members will be able even to begin to justify their allegations—

Mr. Bercow: It is all on the record.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. It is all on the record—and the British people are familiar with that record. Contrary to the statements of Conservative Members, the British people know that, for example, the windfall tax—which Conservative Members use as the basis for justifying their figures on tax rises—was more than well publicised before the general election. The notion that the British people did not know that we would levy a windfall tax on utilities to fund the new deal is ridiculous. The tax was one of the reasons they voted for us.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We will move on now.

Points of Order

1.15 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you give us some guidance on the appropriateness of the Minister for Housing and Planning attending our debate on the Greater London Authority Bill in the light of his very prominent political role in the coming mayoral elections? Indeed, the Minister may wish to consider whether his presence is appropriate; whether it might prejudice his position, and that of the candidate to whom he is giving such visible support; and whether the House would think it appropriate for him to be so involved in a crucial stage in the Bill's passage, given his highly prominent and prejudiced position on parts of it.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I see that the Minister wants to respond.

Mr. Raynsford: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Before the House begins to debate the Bill, I think that it would be right for me to make my position clear to the House.

As hon. Members are well aware, on 30 September, I relinquished my responsibilities as Minister for London. On that same day, the Under–Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), became Minister for London and took over lead responsibility for all decisions on London policy, including policy on the Greater London Authority Bill.

Hon. Members will also be well aware that the Bill is very large and complex. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who was a member of the Committee that considered the Bill, will know just how large and complex it is. For that reason, and because of my considerable involvement in the earlier stages of the Bill's passage, I am continuing to have a role in its passage through the House.

I should like, at the beginning of these proceedings, to emphasise that I have not been responsible for decisions on policy on any of the amendments to the Greater London Authority Bill either in this House or in another place since I ceased to be Minister for London. My involvement today is merely to bring my experience and knowledge of the Bill to the House's aid, and to assist the passage of this complex measure.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your advice on how adequate scrutiny could be given to the Bill. Since the Bill's introduction, there have been no fewer than 1,932 amendments to it. Those amendments have been dealt with in two days on the Floor of the House, two days on Report and 120 hours in Committee. We must now deal with 820 amendments. Although, so far, the time available to us to consider them is open-ended, let us imagine for a moment that we shall have only two days to do so. That would allow us precisely 45 seconds to scrutinise each amendment, thereby denying us the type of scrutiny that was allowed on Second Reading and Report. I should be grateful for your advice, Madam Speaker, on how adequate time might be made available.

Madam Speaker: The answer is in the hands of the House itself. I have just taken business questions lasting three quarters of an hour; if there had not been quite so many questions, we could have moved on sooner to consider the main business. The House itself will decide when we move on.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker; I seek your guidance. You have often told hon. Members that you are not responsible for statements that are part of the cut and thrust of political debate, but are willing to attend to inquiries relating to matters of fact. I am very concerned—as I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) and other hon. Members are—about the statement made by the Prime Minister on 10 March—I quote *The Times*—that

"We have not raised taxes, we have cut them".

In view of very widespread concern about that flagrant untruth—I am sure that it was accidental—by the right hon. Gentleman, are you able to tell me whether there is any procedure to force the Prime Minister to come to the House to make a statement about his selective amnesia and inattention to detail, and his proposals to cure those very serious disorders?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Prime Minister will be here on Wednesday to answer questions for half an hour. I would have thought that it was up to the Opposition—and certainly the Leader of the Opposition—to probe the Prime Minister during that period.

Greater London Authority Bill [*Money*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Greater London Authority Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of the National Loans Fund of any sums required to enable the Public Works Loans Commissioners to make loans to the Greater London Authority or any functional body, within the meaning of the Act; and

(b) the payment of sums into the National Loans Fund.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

1.20 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It is unfortunate to say the least that the Minister failed to seek to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, to explain the nature of this money resolution. Normally, that would be criticised, because Ministers have often failed to do it. However, it is particularly important in this case because the money resolution carries with it significant implications.

I would have thought it a proper courtesy to the House—and essential to the debate—that the Minister explained the background to the money resolution, and gave some indication of the amounts involved. *[Interruption.]* Does my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) wish to intervene?

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I was simply on the edge of my seat with excitement at my right hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend ain't heard nothing yet. The complex nature of the money resolution is such that it requires a fuller explanation than we would normally expect.

The money resolution refers to the national loans fund and the public works loans commissioners making loans to the Greater London Authority or any functional body, and to the payment of sums into the national loans fund.

It would have been helpful if the Minister had explained—however briefly—the role that he sees the national loans fund playing in this matter. I would have benefited from a brief explanation of the nature of the fund, its size, where its revenue comes from, and its accountability, as that is all crucial to the money resolution, and therefore to the approval that the Government are seeking.

We are being asked to approve the payment out of an as yet unspecified fund of any sums required. We are being asked to sign a blank cheque, and to say that we are content that any amount of moneys may be paid out of the fund. Also, we must have fixed in our minds the work that the commissioners do. I would like to know who they are, who appoints them and to whom they are accountable for the loans that they will make to the GLA.

Two bodies are involved in the provision of considerable sums of money, and I would appreciate some guidance from the Minister on the amounts. I have no idea whether we are talking about £50 million, £500 million or £1 billion passing through the mysterious fund and the hands of the hitherto mysterious commissioners, of whom I know little because the Minister has not enlightened us. They, in turn, will make loans to the GLA. On what basis might loans be made?

Before the money resolution is agreed, it is essential that we be given information about the basis on which public works loans commissioners can make loans to the Greater London Authority. I suspect that we are talking about considerable sums of money, so it is important that we understand the relationship between the public works loans commissioners and the Greater London Authority. Those matters are fundamental to proper consideration of the money resolution, which is more complicated than usual. It involves different bodies, and hints at their possible relationship.

We must envisage the flow of moneys into the national loans fund from an as yet undescribed source—it would be useful to know how the national loans fund obtains its funding and moneys. The fund will, in turn, make moneys available to the public works loans commissioners—again, it is essential to know on what basis. The commissioners will in turn make loans to the Greater London Authority.

In any other circumstances, that would begin to look like money-laundering. Although I do not suggest that that is so in this instance, we require more than the usual perfunctory explanations from a courteous Government and a considerate Minister—with whom, regrettably, we are not faced. The Minister seemed to imply that we should nod through the money resolution without showing us the courtesy of providing an explanation of these complex matters.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My right hon. Friend has alerted the House to a worrying subject. Are public works loans commissioners possessed of a financial expertise that is denied to mere mortals, or are they simply well-meaning laymen?

Mr. Forth: We need to explore that in this short debate. We need to know more about the fund and the identity of the mysterious commissioners. We want to make a judgment about their competence to deal with large sums of money. I suspect that such sums will be taxpayers' money, but I do not know, because the House has not been informed of the source, prior to the meander through the convoluted process of funds and commissioners, before the money ends up in the hands of the Greater London Authority.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will have studied the matter carefully, and noticed that the money resolution refers to "any functional body". Thus funds will not only flow to the Greater London Authority. We are considering a complicated nexus of relationships between the origin of the funds and the filtration process by which decisions are made about the disposition of the funds. That is more than enough reason for curiosity about relationships between bodies and amounts of money, and about whether we should approve the money resolution, which, in effect, is a blank cheque.

If the Minister had sought to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, he might have been able to allay such fears, simply by providing explanations and so allowing us to move on briskly after that reassurance. However, he has, regrettably, taken a high-handed attitude, which I hope will not set the tone for the next debate.

As my hon. Friends have pointed out, we must consider many complex matters in the next debate. It would help the Government to ease the passage of the business if the Minister gave us a succinct but sufficient explanation of each matter, rather than simply expecting the House to nod the business through.

It is an understatement to say that our Committee proceedings were unsatisfactory. The number of Lords amendments makes us even more suspicious that the Bill has been grotesquely mishandled and mangled and that it is effectively now a new Bill, in which case we will have to scrutinise it even more closely than we might otherwise have done.

I am trying to give the Minister some guidance on how to ease the Bill's passage through the House; but before we get to all that, I hope that he will tell us more about the money resolution.

1.30 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): As he so often did in Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) spoke with such eloquence and comprehensiveness that there is little left to say in support, but I have one observation that reinforces what he said.

At business questions, the Leader of the House referred to the large number of technical amendments which, she sought to argue, excused the fact that we were confronted with 193 pages of Lords amendments that we have two days at most to consider. We all sympathise with the new Minister, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), for having had to cope with this welter of paper since 30 September. His Back Benchers clearly have confidence in him, for they are not present. His predecessor, now the Minister for Housing and Planning, cannot be invisible in the normal manner of prompters on a stage and is therefore rather conspicuous.

By not speaking to the money resolution, the Minister has demonstrated that what is clearly a technical element of the business for today and Monday will not be explained to us by Ministers. If that is a presentiment for the rest of the two days, some of us, I am afraid, may get slightly impatient before we are through. I very much hope that the Minister will respond fully to the questions that my right hon. Friend has raised, not least because the climate of the rest of our considerations will be a great deal better if he does.

1.32 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): There are some genuine questions to be answered before we decide whether to vote for or against the amendments. I do not like deciding what to do first and trying to work out what the Bill means afterwards. I am unhappy with any suggestion from any Government of whatever political persuasion that we should create a new tier of bureaucracy, which will undoubtedly add to costs, without being told where there will be compensating savings by reducing bureaucracy somewhere else. The House should never authorise any additional expenditure without being crystal clear about what control Parliament has over it.

Will the Minister please put a figure to what he considers to be the meaning of "any sums required"? If so, we can double it and know that we are somewhere near the truth. What will the money be used for? Where will it come from? When the Government were considering the supposed benefits of the authority, what attention was paid to the cost of obtaining those benefits? Some sort of cost-benefit argument is absolutely crucial.

Where will the savings come from to be set against what we are being asked to authorise? What power will Parliament have to scrutinise and control the spending? What control and scrutiny will there be by the GLA itself, what by the mayor, and what by the Treasury? Those are genuine and necessary questions, and we must have answers to them before we vote on the technical matters that follow.

1.35 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I associate the Liberal Democrats with what has already been said. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) has raised some important points, and it is incumbent on the Minister to explain to the House why the money resolution is needed.

1.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): I feel well and truly chastised by the observations made by Opposition Members. Yet all was done with the best of intentions. I rather expected something to be said on the subject, so it seemed only right to listen to the questions so that I could more properly answer them. It is exactly those questions, as posed by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and others, that I now propose to answer.

A money resolution is needed to authorise the issue out of the national loans fund of sums required by the public works loans commissioners to make loans to the GLA or any of its functional bodies. It will also cover consequential payments by the commissioners into the fund.

As bodies whose capital finances are regulated under part IV of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the GLA and its functional bodies have power to borrow from the public works loans commissioners. The commissioners can lend money at rates that are often below those obtainable in the market.

Section 3 of the National Loans Act 1968 makes provision for the funding of loans made by the commissioners out of the national loans fund. The commissioners are empowered to make loans to precepting authorities. The GLA will be a major precepting authority, so the commissioners will be able to lend money to them. Lords amendment No. 169 would amend the National Loans Act 1968, which specifies bodies to which the commissioners can make local loans, to allow them to lend money to the functional bodies, which are neither local nor precepting authorities.

Mr. Forth: Where does the national loans fund get the money from?

Mr. Hill: I propose to come to that point in due course. It was an issue that the right hon. Gentleman raised, and I shall answer it in the proper order.

It is most important that the GLA and the functional bodies should be able to obtain funds for their capital programmes from the public works loans commissioners.

[Mr. Hill]

That will ensure that those bodies can achieve the best value in borrowing for capital purposes by providing them, in common with all other local authorities, with an alternative to borrowing at open market rates.

Questions were asked about the identity of the public works loans commissioners. They are appointed by the Treasury, by royal warrant under the Public Works Loans Act 1946, on the advice of the Prime Minister in consultation with the Chancellor. The current commissioners are listed in the 124th annual report of the Public Works Loan Board, published by HMSO this year, a copy of which is in the Library.

However, before the right hon. Member for Bromley hastens—

Mr. Forth: Bromley and Chislehurst.

Mr. Hill: I am sorry, I meant the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. Before he hastens to the Library to check that information, may I deal with the other questions raised by Opposition Members?

I was asked how much money was involved. That entirely depends on how much the functional bodies wish to borrow—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."]—and on how much the public works loans commissioners decide to lend. How will it be spent? It will be spent on the public purposes defined by bodies such as Transport for London, the London development agency and others. Those functional bodies, and the GLA, can borrow up to the amount for which they have credit approvals available.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, having been a distinguished education Minister in his time, will undoubtedly have dipped into the national loans fund from time to time. As a former Minister, he will certainly know that the functional bodies to which such loans are granted have credit approvals available. Such credit approvals as are available are subject to the scrutiny of Ministers. Indeed, they are dependent on ministerial approval. I hope that that answers the question.

Mr. Bercow: I am perplexed by the explanation the Minister has just given. Can he confirm whether a local authority, such as Lambeth borough council, in whose area he represents the Streatham constituency, would be eligible to apply for such loan assistance? If it would, does he agree that that would be a legitimate source of anxiety to thousands of law-abiding taxpayers, because that council has an almost unrivalled capacity for spending money like confetti in a wholly irresponsible fashion that a Conservative authority would not allow?

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that I have the honour and privilege of representing the south of Lambeth, an area which he represented briefly in the early 1990s. Under the Bill, there is no question of a local authority taking such a loan. However, in answer to the broader question, I confirm that £6 billion a year is lent to local authorities by the PWLB and the outstanding debt is currently about £45 billion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Greater London Authority Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of the National Loans Fund of any sums required to enable the Public Works Loans Commissioners to make loans to the Greater London Authority or any functional body, within the meaning of the Act; and

(b) the payment of sums into the National Loans Fund.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the business statement earlier today, the Leader of the House said that next Monday's business would include the remaining consideration of the Lords amendments to the Greater London Authority Bill, followed by the guillotine motion on another Bill. She did not say when she intended that the guillotine should fall on the first Bill. It would be helpful to me and, I am sure, to other hon. Members if we were told whether it will be at 7 o'clock or 10 o'clock. Whichever it is, it is a scandalously short time in which to examine 820 amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): We cannot pursue business questions at this stage in the afternoon and we must proceed with the matter before the House.

Greater London Authority Bill [*Ways and Means*] (No. 2)

1.42 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Greater London Authority Bill, it is expedient to authorise the making of provision for or in connection with the imposition of charges to corporation tax (including corporation tax on chargeable gains) on bodies or persons to which property, rights or liabilities are transferred or granted by or under the Act.

This is a technical matter, but, lest I should be misinterpreted, I shall briefly explain for the benefit of the House why it is required. It is needed to authorise the tax-neutral transfer of property, rights and liabilities being made under the Bill. We will consider the clauses that will effect the transfers in the course of our consideration.

1.43 pm

Mr. Wilshire: I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation. However, when I hear someone talk about a tax-neutral transfer, it suggests to me that tax will be payable although it will be the person receiving whatever is transferred who pays it, rather than the person making the transfer. Even though the transfer is described as tax-neutral, somebody will have to pay tax. How much tax are we talking about? Someone must have worked out what will be transferred, so it would be helpful to know how much tax will be due. I assume that the tax to be paid will be corporation tax at the normal rate that all businesses pay, and I hope that the Minister will confirm that. Then we will know roughly how much somebody will have to pay.

As I understand it, when the resolution refers to "bodies or persons", it is talking about public bodies and public persons, although I am not sure what a public person is. In any case, the activity will take place in the public sector. If I am correct, the public body or public persons who have to pay the corporation tax once they have assumed the liability will have to get that money from somewhere. Again, I would be most grateful if the Minister would confirm that, once the bodies or persons have been given a tax liability, they will have some form of precepting power—that is, that once they know how much tax they must pay, the bodies or persons will send the matter back to the GLA, which will raise council tax to meet the bill.

If my analysis is correct, will the Minister say how much extra council tax will be payable by the people within the GLA area, so as to give effect to the resolution, when and if the House passes it?

Mr. Forth: Although in one sense I am grateful to the Minister for Housing and Planning for taking the initiative and giving the briefest of explanations about this rather complex matter, I am also rather puzzled. That same Minister told us earlier that he was here only in some slightly odd advisory capacity, that he was no longer the Minister responsible for the substance of the measure that we are considering today, and that he had no knowledge of or input into the amendments tabled today. I am therefore surprised that he has come to the Dispatch Box and purported to explain to the House elements of a Bill for which he has no responsibility and to which he has made no recent input.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend paints a very depressing picture of the Government's lack of respect for the institution of the House of Commons. If the Minister's position is as my right hon. Friend has described, is he not about as much use to our deliberations today as a bicycle without a wheel?

Mr. Forth: My point is that I am genuinely confused about today's proceedings. The Minister did us the courtesy earlier of explaining why he was not responsible for the Bill and how he had had no part in the amendments under consideration. Now, however, he appears at the Dispatch Box as a Minister of the Crown and explains a key element of the Bill to the House.

We must get clear in our minds the relationship between the two Ministers—the Minister for Housing and Planning, and the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill)—who are now sitting on the Front Bench. Who knows what about what, and who does not? Who has responsibility for what, and who has not? As I pointed out earlier, the Minister for Housing and Planning is playing a key role in a political campaign outside the House, on behalf of someone who has a direct interest—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman must make it clear to the House how his remarks relate to the Ways and Means resolution.

Mr. Forth: That is quite simple. The Minister for Housing and Planning was the Minister who tried to explain the Bill when he set out his role today. I am offering him the chance to give a final explanation to the House before he resorts to silence—but I see that the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) wants to tell us.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that we spent 100 hours considering the Bill in Committee? He contributed to many of those hours. At the end of our deliberations, my hon. Friend the Minister received unanimous congratulations from members of the Committee on the way in which he had conducted proceedings.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That intervention also does not relate to the matter before the House.

Mr. Forth: I shall conclude by saying that, if the Minister for Housing and Planning replies to the debate, he should clarify his position. That would enable you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the rest of us, to judge the weight that we give to his comments in the context of this Bill.

Mr. Raynsford: I had thought that I made my position clear in my earlier statement to the House, but perhaps I should repeat it for the benefit of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). Since 30 September, all responsibility for policy matters relating to the Bill, including new amendments tabled since that date, rests with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. However,

[Mr. Raynsford]

as the right hon. Gentleman well knows, I have been associated with the Bill for most of its existence, including the many hours of debate devoted to it in the House and in Committee. Given the size and complexity of the Bill, it seemed sensible—and courteous to the House—to make available that expertise and experience in this debate.

Modesty has never been one of the greatest characteristics of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, but I must tell him that we are dealing today with issues that were clear as points of principle when the Bill was first published.

Essentially, we are dealing with transfers from public sector bodies. The purpose of the resolution is to ensure that simply because of reorganisation within the public sector, a liability for tax does not arise that would not have arisen if the previous public sector framework had existed. As I said, we will deal with each of the individual transfers when we come to them.

An illustration may be helpful. One obvious area is transfers from English Partnerships or the Commission for New Towns to the London development agency. Because of English Partnerships' role in reclaiming land and encouraging development, when that land is sold it will have a liability to pay tax on the proceeds, but it can offset against that the cost of reclamation and other work. Lords amendments Nos. 522 and 525 will ensure that any expenditure incurred by English Partnerships or the Commission for New Towns in developing assets such as land for reclamation or regeneration can be offset against any tax payable on the proceeds of sale of that land by the LDA. That is the point—to achieve a tax-neutral position, which would exist but for the fact that a new public sector framework had been created.

There is no sinister purpose—it is a policy objective that was clear from the outset, when I was responsible for the Bill. Therefore, I hope that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst will accept that it is proper for me to answer on that point.

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Greater London Authority Bill, it is expedient to authorise the making of provision for or in connection with the imposition of charges to corporation tax (including corporation tax on chargeable gains) on bodies or persons to which property, rights or liabilities are transferred or granted by or under the Act.

Orders of the Day

Greater London Authority Bill

Lords amendments considered.

1.53 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must draw the House's attention to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 10, 12 to 14, 168, 169, 204, 206, 207, 232, 515, 555 to 557, 740 and 794 which are to be considered today. If the House agrees to any of these Lords amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Clause 2

MEMBERSHIP OF THE AUTHORITY AND THE ASSEMBLY

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, line 18, at end insert

(", and

(c) the holding of an election for Mayor in the event of a vote of no confidence in accordance with section 14(d) below")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 6 and the Government motion to disagree.

Mr. Raynsford: We are dealing with impeachment, which was debated at great length in earlier stages in this House and in the other place. The key issues are, first, the separate role of the mayor and the assembly in the new structure of governance that we have created in London, with a division of powers between an executive mayor and an assembly performing essentially a scrutiny function. The second key issue is what checks are in place to ensure that the mayor exercises those powers responsibly and properly. The third is procedures for removal from office of a mayor if he or she is guilty of wrongdoing.

The amendments would allow the assembly to dismiss the mayor if 19 of its 25 members voted to impeach him or her. Essentially, that would make the mayor subordinate to the assembly and it would change the structure of the new authority created by the Bill. We debated the subject at length and the Government made it clear why such proposals were unacceptable. Essentially, they would allow the mayor to be removed as a result of a political action by the assembly, which was never the Government's policy intention. We believe that that would be wrong.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I will give way in a moment, but want to make a little progress first.

The mayor and the assembly members will have different mandates and roles. The mayor will be a directly elected executive and the assembly will be there to

scrutinise the exercise of his or her executive powers. Potentially, just over 5 million people could vote for the mayor. It seems astonishing that someone who could be elected by 5 million people should be liable to be removed by the votes of only 19 people, who are elected under a totally different mandate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I have already said that I will give way to the—

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have heard the Minister's explanation of his role here today. We are dealing, however, with a matter that bears directly on the position of a future mayor of London under the Bill. The hon. Gentleman is the campaign manager for an aspirant to that office. Is it correct—is it proper—for the hon. Gentleman to deal with a matter that relates directly to the role of a future mayor of London? It strikes me as not only inappropriate but possibly improper.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The matter being dealt with is a matter of public policy, and any Minister is entitled to deal with it.

Mr. Raynsford: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can quite understand why the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is concerned about the possibility of a mayoral candidate being subject to impeachment procedures, considering the candidate that his party has chosen. Let me make it clear that I am talking about the principles of the Bill, which I defended in the Chamber and in Committee on many occasions. The right hon. Gentleman was well aware of my position during those debates, and it is exactly the same today as it was then. To suggest otherwise is absurd.

If, after four years in office, a mayor no longer commands the confidence of the people of London, it is for the people of London to remove that mayor. That is the framework that we have put in place, and it is the right democratic framework.

Mr. Simon Hughes: When the Minister's responsibilities included London, some three months ago, he circulated a consultation paper for which he had written the preface. It included these sentences:

"The election of a Mayor and Assembly for London fulfils the Government's commitment . . . Londoners will choose the Mayor whose policies match their needs and aspirations, and Assembly members who will work with the Mayor and hold him or her to account."

How can the Assembly hold a mayor to account if its members have no sanction by which to get rid of him?

Mr. Raynsford: As the hon. Gentleman ought to know, the Assembly has a number of sanctions.

Mr. Hughes: Not to get rid of him.

Mr. Raynsford: It has a number of sanctions. However, we do not propose that its members should be able to override the democratic mandate of the people of London who have separately elected the mayor. The Liberal Democrats never accepted that distinction, because they believe in a more traditional, old-fashioned style of local government, in which the leader is elected from among the elected members of the authority. We debated at length why that system was not appropriate, why there should be separate mandates and why the mayor of London should be elected by all 5 million Londoners—or, at least, by all those who choose to vote out of the 5 million who are eligible. Those votes determine who shall be the mayor; they shall determine if the mayor should no longer serve as mayor.

As I have already stressed, the Assembly has considerable powers—to scrutinise, to highlight weaknesses and, ultimately, to adjust the budget, which will have a profound effect on the mayor's ability to deliver his or her programme.

Mr. Hughes: How does the Minister think that the Members of the European Parliament, who are directly and democratically elected by the people of the European Union countries, would feel if they were told that they had a right to hold the members of the European Commission to account—a commission appointed by Governments elected democratically—but no right to get rid of them if it was thought that they were not doing their job properly?

Mr. Raynsford: That is a curious and completely inapposite parallel, because the European Commission is not elected. We are talking about a framework within which the mayor of London is elected by the votes of 5 million Londoners. It would be quite inappropriate for the people of London to elect a mayor one day and be told the next that the person whom they had elected was put out of office because a majority of three quarters in the Assembly did not like that mayor. That would be preposterous.

If the amendment were accepted, a mayor could be elected who was extremely popular but whose party had little or no support in London and, because of the way in which elections take place, the parties that gained three quarters of the Assembly seats on the same day as the mayor was elected could vote that mayor out of office the following week. That would be nonsense, and it would show contempt for the people of London, but it would be the consequence of accepting the amendment. That is one reason why we ask the House to disagree with the Lords amendment. I give way to the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who was a member of the Standing Committee.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): If the mayor were found to be corrupt or to be acting improperly or abusing his office, especially early in his term, it would be wholly wrong for him to be able to continue, notwithstanding a two-thirds vote against him in the Assembly. How could the people of London bring him into account in such circumstances? Is there no mechanism for that other than rioting in the streets or disobedience?

2 pm

Mr. Raynsford: I agree that if the mayor acted corruptly, were convicted of an offence or adjudged incapable or unfit to hold office, he should be removed. That is the exactly what the Bill provides. If the mayor is convicted of an offense and a sentence of more than three

[Mr. Raynsford]

months' imprisonment is passed on him or her, is adjudged bankrupt or disqualified under part II of the Representation of the People Act 1983 or under section 17 or 18 of the Audit Commission Act 1998, he or she is disqualified from office. As hon. Members know, those circumstances are analogous to those that apply elsewhere in local government. Such provision is right and proper, but it is a different matter to suggest that a body elected on a separate mandate should have the power to remove someone elected by the people of London whom they simply dislike. I should have thought that Opposition Members would be only too well aware of the unfortunate consequences of going down that route.

At the end of last year and the early months of this, we saw an extraordinarily banal process develop on the other side of the Atlantic. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) uses a rather unparliamentary word.

Mr. Edward Davey: I said "crass".

Mr. Raynsford: I misheard the hon. Gentleman and I am delighted that he has clarified the matter. The American Senate's impeachment of President Clinton was crass and demeaning for the whole democratic process on the other side of Atlantic, as the people of America now know. It was a crude, partisan attempt to replace a president on essentially trivial and trumped-up grounds. That is exactly the process that would apply if we accepted this amendment.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): Quite right.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the hon. Gentleman really think that it is in the interests of democracy that a mayor elected with the support of the people of London could be removed by a partisan group of people from other parties who happen to gang up in a political conspiracy against him? That is what happened in America. It was demeaning to American democracy and we will not import it into our democratic structures.

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Gentleman may believe that it was crass and not like the idea that America has a democratic system that allows impeachment, but does he believe that it would have been better if President Nixon had remained in office?

Mr. Raynsford: No, because I believe that the impeachment was justified in those circumstances.

Mr. Woodward: Pick and choose.

Mr. Raynsford: It is not pick and choose. I was comparing the case of a president who had committed clear wrongdoing on a major scale and attempted to cover it up with that of a president who acted in a way that was below the highest standards of conduct but had not diminished his ability to do his job. It was the partisan conspiracy against the President because of his sexual behaviour, irrespective of his ability to perform the functions of President, that made the process look demeaning and inappropriate. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that it would be utterly wrong if a mayor of London elected by a majority of people in this capital city were subject to impeachment procedures and removed from office simply because three quarters of the Assembly did not like his sexual behaviour. That is the parallel, and I hope that he will answer my point.

Mr. Woodward: The parallel that the Minister raises is a good one. I ask him again about the case of President Nixon. If the process of impeachment and hearings did not exist in the United States, how does he believe that President Nixon would have been dealt with? Or does he believe that it would have been better for him to continue in office?

Mr. Raynsford: As I said, I believe that in that case the process was appropriate, but, in the case of President Clinton, it was abused. We believe that on the whole the safeguards in the legislation provide a bulwark against wrongdoing by a mayor. Sanctions are provided through the control of the budget to ensure that the mayor does not pursue policies at variance with the interests of the people of London. We do not believe that it would be in any way right to allow a mayor to be removed from office simply because three quarters of the members of the Assembly elected under a different mandate happened to disagree with him or her. None of the Opposition Members have answered that point.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I will give way in a moment to the hon. Gentleman, who was an assiduous member of the Committee and led for the Opposition, but I put it to him that the Opposition have not answered the point that the procedure agreed by the other place would allow a mayor democratically elected by the people of London to be removed on the say so of 19 people elected on a separate mandate, who could be acting for purely perverse, partisan purposes. That would be the consequence of the amendment, and it would be wrong. Unless Opposition Members can answer that point, they have no case.

Mr. Ottaway: Does the Minister accept that there is a zone somewhere between his mandate, as he calls it, and the provisions of the Bill in which someone convicted and sentenced to less than three months imprisonment would be disqualified? In this Parliament, Ministers have resigned as a result of an error of judgment on Clapham common. Ministers have resigned because they have offshore funds. I am talking about the former Paymaster General. Ministers have resigned because they failed to declare loans taken from building societies. None of those things resulted in convictions or sentences of up to three months. There must be a way in which someone who makes such errors of judgment can be called to account, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said.

Mr. Raynsford: As I have already said, the mayor will be called to account. He will be liable to scrutiny in the monthly Assembly meetings. His or her budget will be subject to approval by the Assembly. If the Assembly has a two-thirds majority, it can override the mayor's budget. If the mayor is absent for a period without good reason he can be removed from office. If he is guilty of offences,

is bankrupt or is disqualified under other legislation, he can be removed. Those are important safeguards. They provide the necessary framework of accountability. To do otherwise is to confuse the two mandates—the mandate given to the mayor by the vote of all Londoners as against the mandate given to members of the Assembly either by the constituencies or at large for members of the Assembly.

Mr. Edward Davey *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman, who was a member of the Committee.

Mr. Davey: It is interesting that the Minister cites in his defence the impeachment process in the United States. When we raised that in Committee to support our argument for accountability, the Minister said that the case was not relevant. He seems to have changed his tune. Can he cite one example of a mayoral system—not a presidential system—in another country in which there is no democratic safeguard between elections?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman's comment is preposterous. He proposes not a democratic safeguard but a means to ensure that the mandate of one group of people can overrule another. I accept that he does not understand our framework. He was always committed to a different one, with which the Liberal Democrats are more familiar, in which all members of a council are elected together and one is elected from within that number to be leader. We have rejected that system. We have gone for an alternative model of a separation of powers. In that model, it is right that the mayor, who has the executive power should be subject to scrutiny by the Assembly. It is not right that the mayor can be removed by the Assembly because the two have different and distinct mandates.

I made it clear in Committee—I remember it only too well—that the procedures in America made a mockery of the process of impeachment and provided a good reason why we should not adopt such a model for London.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): We must acknowledge that, as we are introducing a new system, there is genuine concern about the concentration of so much power into the hands of one individual. At present, there are relevant parts of other measures and of this one that can overcome the problem of the mad and the criminally bad, but there is also the difficulty of the zone of differences that has been mentioned. I do not want to enter into discussion of the problems of the gradations of bizarre sexual practices, or whatever.

However, if there are gradations of unacceptable behaviour and if the mayor's behaviour leads to public opprobrium, such matters need to be dealt with, although not necessarily in this Bill. If the mayoral system is to be developed under measures to be introduced in the next Queen's Speech, perhaps we could address those matters at that time, or we might review them after five years—the first period of office for the mayor of the Greater London Authority that will be elected in May next year.

Mr. Raynsford: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's reservations as to the model that we proposed; he has expressed his concerns. We have tried to establish a framework under which the mayor can act effectively. We want a model for effective city governance, but we are also determined that such governance should be accountable. The framework ensures openness on a scale that no one could possibly criticise. The mayor will be subject to intense scrutiny at all times; his or her actions will be transparent, and will be examined in detail by members of the Assembly. I have already referred to the safeguards; it would be tedious for me to repeat them.

Mr. Wilshire: It may make the Minister somewhat nervous when I tell him that I have a little sympathy for the point that he made as to the perverseness of some actions. However, what we are hearing are arguments for limiting the power of impeachment—not for making it impossible. Will he consider tabling an amendment that increases the number from 19 to 20 or 21, or that tries to define the perverse reasons when impeachment should not be used? The grey area to which my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) referred is absolutely crucial: there are some actions that are politically unacceptable; they fall short of being criminal, but they are not perverse. Will the Minister consider an amendment, rather than saying that there should be no impeachment?

Mr. Raynsford: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. During our considerations in Committee, at an earlier stage of the Bill's progress, we explored several different options, tabled as amendments. Some of those proposed that there could be petitions from the people of London to remove the mayor—a large number of signatures being sufficient to trigger that. We decided that it would be difficult to verify a large number of signatures in such a way as to give confidence. We discussed different permutations of the maximum number of people who might be required to sign or agree with an impeachment motion so as to make it effective. Our conclusion was that all those proposals were defective and that the danger of abuse of the system—simply to put out a mayor on a partisan vote—was such that it was better to leave the original framework that was in the Bill. That was our judgment at that time; it remains our judgment today.

As I have said, the mayor will be subject to intense scrutiny, and his or her actions will be constantly reviewed—not only by the Assembly, but by the London media. The people of London will have every opportunity to make their views known. Furthermore, a mayor who is running into difficulty, and does not have a popular mandate, will be extremely vulnerable when the Assembly scrutinises his or her budget. That will be the Assembly's key sanction against a mayor who strays into territory—I accept that it is possible—where he or she has not acted in a way that is outright criminal, but where his or her actions appear not to be in the interests of the people of London. In that case, the Assembly will have the sanction to take measures—through control of the budget—to amend the mayor's policies. That is the safeguard. The people of London have the right to remove the person whom they entrust with the job of mayor. That is the ultimate democratic sanction, which can be properly exercised only by the same group who have the right to elect the mayor in the first place.

2.15 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister explain to the House why, during discussion of measures introduced by his Government on the effect of a vote of no confidence in the Scottish Parliament, this Parliament decided that a majority in favour of such a vote against the First Minister of Scotland—the Executive of Scotland—would be sufficient for the First Minister to resign?

Mr. Raynsford: I put two points to the hon. Gentleman. First, that what he describes is not impeachment, and, secondly, it is a separate matter because it involves the Scottish Parliament. We believe that there should be different provisions for different tiers of government. What we propose in London is unique. We have not done it before. The hon. Gentleman may not like it; he made it pretty clear throughout the previous debates that he and his party do not want a mayor—they want the old, traditional local government pattern, with everyone elected and the leader being elected in the way that has been done for time immemorial.

I am sorry, but we disagree. We believe that that is not the right way forward for London, where we want a radical and innovative framework that allows the mayor to be directly elected, so that he or she can exercise the type of power and influence that directly elected mayors elsewhere in the world are able to exercise in the interests of their cities. If hon. Members consider the way in which effective mayors, throughout the world, have transformed their cities and have made a difference, they will understand why we have introduced these measures. The intervention made by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey is a throwback to the old Liberal Democrat style of doing things.

We are moving forward; we are setting up a new structure of government. Our proposals provide for transparency and accountability. There are safeguards; and there is an appropriate disciplinary framework. I do not believe that the impeachment procedures that were added to the Bill in another place could operate without the gravest risk of abuse. That would bring the whole exercise into disrepute, in the same way as occurred in the United States. I urge the House to reject the Lords amendments.

Mr. Woodward: This is an extremely important matter. The consequence of a vote of no confidence in the mayor would be very serious, as the Minister acknowledges. Such a power should not be used lightly. However, Conservative Members take the view that we should trust those who have been democratically elected to the Assembly to exercise their responsibilities with seriousness and due diligence, and that we should trust them in this important matter of impeachment. It is a huge power; it is a significant demonstration of our trust in those whom London will elect next May to exercise that power diligently. We believe that we should trust the Assembly members, who will have been democratically elected, and that the Minister is wrong not to trust them to behave suitably.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I have listened carefully to the debate. How does the hon. Gentleman define the word "diligent"? It is a wonderful field for legalese. I can picture litigation ad nauseam in the divisional court on that one point. I suggest that it is not a solution.

Mr. Woodward: That there is difficulty in defining "diligent" is no reason not to trust that people will exercise diligence.

We look forward to hearing the views of hon. Members on the important subject of the amendment. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and the hon. Members for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) have decided not to be in Chamber this afternoon. I would have thought that a debate on a Bill to set up the institution that they want to lead would be an occasion on which they could take time out of their busy schedules to turn up at the House. However, perhaps they have received advice from the Minister for Housing and Planning, whom we are delighted to see in the Chamber this afternoon—if only in his capacity as the campaign manager for one of the candidates.

Mr. Gapes: Can the hon. Gentleman tell us whether Lord Archer is also in the House at this time?

Mr. Woodward: It is significant that the hon. Gentleman does not realise that Lord Archer sits not in this House but in another place. However, we hope that the hon. Gentleman will catch up with the movement of history as the afternoon continues.

Mr. Gapes: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that Lord Archer is sitting up in the Gallery watching us?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. First, it is not right to refer in that way to Members, or anybody in other places, who might be present outside this Chamber. Secondly, those remarks are straying far from the subject of the debate.

Mr. Woodward: This Bill is about the future of London—our city. The mayor's responsibilities are great and, for the sake of London, a mechanism should be enshrined in the Bill that can effect the mayor's dismissal. Of course, it must be fair to the mayor, to the Assembly and, above all, to the people of London. Although we hope that the power would not need to be exercised, it would be a mistake to assume that there could never be circumstances in which the Assembly would lose confidence in the mayor and which would therefore give rise to a motion of no confidence.

We are concerned about the principle of the amendment. We have legitimate concerns about the provisions for impeachment but, realistically, the two are related. In considering the amendment, we must ask what sort of circumstances could cause the Assembly to lose confidence in the mayor. To assume that that could never happen is to ignore the lessons of history. For that reason, we find it difficult to agree with the response by Ministers in another place to reject that procedure. At best, it is baffling and, at worst, foolish.

The Government have needed to revise dramatically their original proposals, which is why today we begin a debate on more than 800 Government amendments to the original Bill. Given that the first draft of the Bill was

inconsistent and technically flawed, and that the Government have already given very poor consideration to major parts of the Bill, it would be arrogant of them to assume that they might not need to give proper consideration to this amendment. It is remarkable that such a long and complex Bill does not include the power to dismiss the mayor through a vote of no confidence.

In another place, the noble Lord Whitty defended the Government's decision not to give the Assembly powers to dismiss the mayor by saying that the Opposition had misunderstood the nature of the Assembly and the mayor. He said that giving the Assembly the power to sack the mayor would make the Assembly's mandate

"in some sense superior to that of the mayor."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 October 1999; Vol. 604, c. 231.]

We believe that his interpretation is flawed. Like assemblies throughout the world, the London Assembly must serve as a check on the Government. Where appropriate, it should also serve as a check on the mayor. There should be a mechanism to redress both the conduct and the power of the mayor, if that power appears to have been abused. The alternative is simply to make the mayor untouchable.

The Government say that the mayor could be unseated in a "frivolous" act by the Assembly, or for the

"crime of being momentarily unpopular."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 October 1999; Vol. 604, c. 231.]

In an Assembly of 25 men and women elected under proportional representation, almost all parts of the Assembly would have to be united in opposition to the mayor under those proposals. The suggestion that that could happen for a frivolous act or for being momentarily unpopular is, therefore, remote—even incredible.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I follow what my hon. Friend is saying, but I could also conceive of the political parties, for some extraordinary reason—but it could happen—getting together to get at the mayor. If that happened, surely the common sense of Londoners would visit vengeance on Assembly members in the following election. In any case, it would not preclude the mayor, having undergone a vote of no confidence, standing again and being re-elected. Does not that cover the Minister's concerns?

Mr. Woodward: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a great shame that, when those concerns were raised in another place, the Government failed properly to consider the proposals.

It is important to trust members of the Assembly. Conditions could be found which would appease people who are genuinely concerned. Let us look at the circumstances that might give rise to such a vote and at whether it would be appropriate. Let us assume that the mayor has been elected. Let us even assume that a Labour candidate has become mayor. He or she would have survived the bewildering electoral machine of the Labour party, which, unlike the Conservative party, does not believe in one member, one vote. Also unlike the Conservative party, its members' votes are not treated equally, but are weighted to give advantage to particular candidates.

Having survived that selection procedure—which, we note, is not inclined to favour candidates such as the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)—and having been supported by the Prime Minister, the candidate goes on to win the popular vote of our city. What would happen if it were discovered that, in the process of securing that nomination as mayor, the candidate had breached the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998? It sounds incredible. Could it really happen?

Only this week, *The Observer* reported that a campaign team for one Labour mayoral candidate may have breached, either in principle or in point of law, the Data Protection Act. Information was allegedly made available to one candidate, and not to others. The Government have given many explanations, but have not yet settled on the precise one that they wish to use. As they told the "Today" programme, they do not quite know, but they think that that is because it is not relevant. That is why the Data Protection Registrar is now looking into those allegations, and the House will await the outcome of that serious charge with interest.

There may or may not be a case to answer. Evidence of such a breach may not emerge fully until after the election on 4 May next year. If so, and if that Labour candidate has become mayor of London, would it be in the interests of London and our democracy that the Assembly has no power to express a vote of no confidence in a figurehead who has gerrymandered the process in such a way? A criminal or civil offence may even have been committed. The power to dismiss the mayor would be essential to the well-being of democracy and of London. The Minister for Housing and Planning, a campaign manager for one of the candidates, makes the extraordinary proposition that the Assembly should have no power to get rid of a mayor. He believes that such a democratic check is "preposterous". Now we know where Labour's arrogance leads us—a repeal of the quinquennial Act will no doubt follow.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend is instructing the House on some serious issues. The Labour party may be keen to follow what I might call the Welsh model, whereby the Welsh Agriculture Secretary had a significant vote of no confidence cast against her and then refused to resign. By so doing, the authority and credibility of devolution in Wales have been called into question. That is hardly the way for our Assembly and mayoralty to begin.

Mr. Woodward: My hon. Friend makes a telling point.

There may be circumstances other than breaches of the Data Protection Act in which the Assembly may wish to test its confidence in the mayor. Let us imagine the candidate, now mayor, who finds himself driving the Assembly to commit the kind of folly that he last perpetrated when he was leader of a London borough council. It can happen, because it has happened. Under those conditions, a vote of no confidence in the mayor would be entirely appropriate.

Let us remember what happened in Camden when millions of pounds were squandered on ideologically driven, wasteful schemes, in which buildings in Hampstead, Belsize Park, Swiss Cottage and other areas were knocked down. In their place were built ugly, concrete housing blocks, which represented some of the worst examples of post-war architecture. Between 1965 and 1975, Camden spent £100 million pulling down large areas of the borough to make way for towers and terraces of modern council flats.

[Mr. Woodward]

We know under whose direction that happened. Had the population of Camden increased, that expenditure, while not forgivable, might have been understandable. Yet between 1961 and 1975, when all that money was being wasted, Camden's population fell by a fifth. In 1975, Camden proposed spending the then colossal sum of £2 million to convert just nine houses into council flats. That seems beyond belief, but that was what happened when the then leader of Camden council encouraged his cohorts to behave in that way. What if the right hon. Gentleman exercised the same leadership in his capacity as mayor of London? He would have control of £3.2 billion.

2.30 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that this is not a debate about potential candidates or particular parts of London. I should be grateful if he would address his remarks specifically to the amendment before the House.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As it is essential that we consider the whole business of impeachment and what might constitute grounds for a vote of no confidence, we must test the conditions that may arise. If we cannot think of any conditions for a vote of no confidence, the Government would be right to resist the amendment. However, if the Government properly considered the evidence available, they would have the humility to say that they have made a mistake and that they were wrong not to provide powers of impeachment.

When the mayor is elected next year, he will have control of £3.2 billion. That is a large sum of money, and the mayor will have great authority over how that money is spent. It is relevant to examine how candidates may spend that money if they became mayor. The way in which that money is spent may give rise to a vote of no confidence.

That London borough became a byword for waste and incompetence. It would be a tragedy if, as a result of the Government's arrogance and refusal to consider this issue, London became a byword for waste and incompetence. It is relevant that a borough such as Camden had a housing revenue account deficit of more than £1 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is again doing what I asked him not to do.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am testing a proposition. What would happen if someone had control of an account and irresponsibly allowed it to increase 24 times in a decade?

Mr. Gapes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance. Is it in order for the debate to be used to slur the integrity of an individual, as is happening at the moment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can safely leave such matters to the Chair.

Mr. Woodward: I am sure that we are all grateful for your guidance on this matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not least because there is no intent to slur. I am reporting the facts and considering the consequences of the Assembly being unable to dismiss a mayor of London who carried out such policies and behaved in that way.

We would have been delighted if the right hon. Gentleman had come to the House this afternoon to explain himself. We are sorry that he is not present. We understand why the Minister for Housing and Planning has directed his candidate not to be here. It is probably wise for him not to be present this afternoon.

Inquiries have been made into the running of some London councils. Those independent inquiries have had something to say about waste, incompetence, arrogance and corruption. When those allegations have been tested in the courts, some individuals have been fully acquitted, but some have not.

I am sure that hon. Members will remember the Appleby inquiry into Lambeth council in July 1995. It reported a catastrophic litany of fraud, mismanagement and dogmatic left-wing leadership that had resulted in the loss of millions of pounds and plunged the Authority into chaos. The inquiry stated:

"Lambeth is in an appalling mess and it is unlikely that any department is properly managed."

That is relevant to London and to the mayoral election next year. If the mayor were responsible for waste and mismanagement, we would expect an inquiry to be held. If the Assembly were to uphold the recommendations of that inquiry, it might want to dismiss the mayor. Regrettably, councils in London have had such policies. We believe that it is a mistake not to be able to dismiss the mayor.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) accused me of casting a slur. We give credit where credit is due. Although they beggar belief, the House should be reminded of the views of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras when he was shadow Environment Secretary. In 1995, he condemned Lambeth. He said:

"Waste and incompetence cannot be tolerated. What happened was a disgrace for everybody concerned."

Mr. Raynsford: Quite right.

Mr. Woodward: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The difficulty I have is that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras carried out in Camden the very policies for which he condemned Lambeth.

Lambeth now has £929 million of debt that was built up under Labour. We are concerned that similar debt should not build up when we have a mayor for London. If a mayor for London allows such a debt to build up, he should be dismissed by a vote of no confidence.

Incompetence in Lambeth continues. We now learn that Lambeth council has been exposed as so incompetent that a squatter is claiming ownership of a £400,000 house. He has lived in it for 16 years and has paid no rent because the council forgot that it owned the house. What is the council's response? It says that it will try to reclaim the property. It is spending council tax payers' money on legal fees. If a mayor presided over such incompetence, the Assembly should have the power to dismiss him.

What if the mayor abused the power to raise revenue in London? In Hammersmith and Fulham, the council tax has increased by 50 per cent. since 1993. As a result,

five old people's homes have been closed and there is no provision to replace them; 70 home helps have been sacked; only 34 per cent. of council house repair appointments are kept; burial costs have gone up by 60 per cent. and cremation costs by 50 per cent.; and libraries have been closed. If the mayor presided over such chaos in London, should not the Assembly be able to get rid of him? Does it have to wait years to dismiss the mayor, with people paying more and more tax to meet higher and higher bills?

What if the Assembly were to discover that fraud was taking place under the mayor's administration? The Minister for Housing and Planning tells us that it is all right, because if the mayor does not have a conviction of more than three months inside Wormwood Scrubs all is well. Presumably, his question and answer sessions would take place every day on the hour in the exercise yard. Some of us think that that is not a good standard to set for the mayor of London.

Mr. Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): The Conservatives should change their candidate then.

Mr. Woodward: The interesting thing about the hon. Gentleman's remarks is that the gentleman to whom he referred has twice been exonerated by a DTI investigation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not want the House to talk about specific personalities or candidates.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for reminding us of that, because, as the DTI said, there was no case to answer.

Even if a mayor is not charged with a criminal offence, the Assembly should take action if there are strong grounds for assuming that fraud has taken place in his administration. As the Bill stands, the Assembly would be powerless to dismiss the mayor. Some hon. Members may believe that that could not happen. However, in the Appleby report, some 500 council employees were believed to have committed fraud by falsely claiming housing benefit and income support.

If a mayor presides over waste, incompetence and fraud, is it preposterous—to use the Minister's word—that the Assembly should be able to dismiss the person who presides over such chaos?

Mr. Gapes: The hon. Gentleman is obviously not aware that neither the mayor not the Greater London Authority is responsible for housing or housing benefit.

Mr. Woodward: What a telling point the hon. Gentleman makes. That was absolutely first class. We have all enjoyed reading the Bill, and are grateful for his telling observation. We take note of his point, but we have read the Bill, too.

Regrettably, corruption has been a hallmark of left-wing councils. It is obvious that the Labour party is still worried about low council standards. In August 1997, newspapers reported that the Prime Minister had ordered an inquiry into the activities of Labour-run councils throughout Britain in an attempt to avoid allegations of corruption or impropriety.

Senior Labour officials told newspapers that the Government's image had been damaged by revelations about authorities in Glasgow, Monklands, Doncaster and Hackney. More than 30 authorities in various parts of Britain were reportedly being investigated by district auditors, by the police or by the party's own national executive committees. If such revelations were to appear one day about the mayor, surely the Assembly should have the power to dismiss him. Does the Minister still believe that that would be preposterous?

The mayor will have the power to create a climate of opinion. In London, we rightly depend on the authority and high standing of our police, and our support for the police is essential if we are to have a well-protected city. The mayor's attitude to the police is also essential to fostering a spirit of trust and co-operation. We are now told that some mayoral candidates are prepared to bend their views to comply with the views of the Prime Minister.

Labour often wants to rewrite the past but, if there is a Labour mayor, that past will not be ignored. We should not dismiss from memory the views of those who have said such things as:

"The task, surely, is to break the Metropolitan Police Force as at present constituted."

The hon. Gentleman who made those remarks may regret them today, but we should not forget such remarks, and we should not forget that the GLC spent £400,000 a year on a propaganda battle with the police. The expression of such views would rightly require the Assembly to review the question of whether it had confidence in the mayor.

There are many reasons why the question of impeachment is relevant. The only thing that is feeble is the Minister's attitude: he is too arrogant even to consider the proposal. He may think it old-fashioned. He may be one of those Labour Members who have changed their views on everything that they stood for when they were elected. The truth is, however, that London needs a strong voice. London needs a mayor in whom it can believe. London needs an Assembly that will be able to throw out a mayor who exceeds or abuses his powers, or behaves in a corrupt, fraudulent or bad way.

This afternoon we have been given a number of illustrations of ways in which power can be abused and can corrupt the individuals who exercise it. No one wants a return to such values; no one wants to see them in practice in London. But there can be no guarantee that the former politics of the GLC, or of councils such as Camden and Lambeth, will not be implemented by a future mayor trying to run the Assembly.

The power to dismiss the mayor must be enshrined in the Bill. Not to enshrine that power would be an act of enormous folly and arrogance. We urge the House to support the amendment, and to encapsulate this crucial principle in the legislation.

Mr. McDonnell: I do not support the proposals because I do not think that they are practical at this stage. I accept that powers exist in this and other legislation to remove lunatics and criminals. Arguably, that could apply to some of the present candidates, but there is the issue of behaviour that engenders such public opprobrium that the climate created among the London public suggests that the mayor must go, and I feel that we should consider that at some future date. Certain issues relating to the governance of London may cause people eventually to lose all confidence in a certain individual.

[Mr. McDonnell]

At present, we in the House of Commons rely not on process but on moral pressure when the question of a resignation arises, but I fear that, for some, moral pressure may not be enough. The mayoral system constitutes a step change in our system of local government—it concentrates powers in the hands of one individual to an extent that has not been seen before. The new system may well be extended throughout the country by means of possible future legislation, and I think that we should review it at some point in order to ensure its effective operation. We should, for instance, consider the possibility of a right of recall of mayors during their period in office. Perhaps we could develop a mechanism that would not depend entirely on Assembly members.

2.45 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman—who is my near neighbour—agrees with us in principle, but why does he feel that the matter should be addressed in the future rather than now? I should have thought that this was the ideal opportunity for us to address it.

Mr. McDonnell: I do not think that we can address it now because none of the options that we have considered so far strikes me as both practicable and fair. More work is needed. Rather than delaying progress on a Bill that is so important to the future of London, we may be able to deal with the issue in a local government Bill. We should at least review it after a period during which we have experienced the mayoral system in London and, perhaps, elsewhere.

We need a mechanism that does not rely on the dangerous principle of placing responsibility on Assembly members, but seeks to ensure that the mayor may have to reaffirm his or her mandate with the London electorate. If the mayor is found to be acting in a way that generates sufficient public opprobrium, and if moral pressure is not sufficient to cause him or her to resign, at least he or she will be forced to let the people decide whether he or she should continue in office—or even continue to implement certain policies.

I believe that we should review the position after, perhaps, five years, and that we should start the examination fairly soon. None of the options that have been described so far satisfy my wish for a balance between consistency of government and fairness and the involvement of the electorate. I think that we should consider options that may go further, triggering a re-election that will ask the electorate to decide.

Mr. Simon Hughes: In many circumstances, the argument of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) would be entirely valid. If the Government cannot find the necessary time now, however, no doubt we shall have a later opportunity to consider the issue.

The Government on whose platform the hon. Gentleman was elected had been in opposition for 18 years, and had been committed to restoring Greater London government for 13. It had had plenty of time to think about the issue. The Bill has been going through Parliament for a year. It has been considered at length in Committee, on Report and at Third Reading. It has returned from the other place having secured a majority of nearly two to one for the simple proposition—let us not confuse the issue—that it should include a provision stating that, if a motion of no confidence is passed by 19 or more of 25 Greater London Assembly members, the mayor should go. I feel that, although re-examining the position over the next five years may be a wonderful idea, there is no good reason not to face up to the issue now.

As the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) said, we are returning—for a final two days or so—to what I gather from the Clerks is probably the largest Bill with which Parliament has had to deal during this century. It has 330 clauses and 27 schedules, and 820 amendments have been tabled. I also gather that it is the first two-volume Bill. Moreover, as the Minister pointed out, the Bill proposes a unique structure. Earlier, we asked whether it was fish or fowl; I think that, as the day goes on, we are reaching the view that it is increasingly less fish and more fowl.

Mr. Raynsford: Very fine fare.

Mr. Hughes: The Minister was partly responsible for the Bill's creation, so he would say that, wouldn't he?

I think that we should concentrate on the central issue—the only issue in regard to which the Lords overturned the Government's proposals by a significant majority when the Government did not undertake to return with similar proposals of their own. Later, we shall have an important debate on equality and anti-discrimination measures. The Government were defeated on that matter, but they agreed to accept the Lords amendments. On this occasion, the amendments remain contentious.

I pay tribute to my noble Friend Baroness Hamwee, who moved the original amendment in the Lords and who worked with Conservatives and independent Cross Benchers to try to find the best alternative proposal. As we did in the House and in Committee, they considered various options.

In Committee, my hon. Friends and I originally proposed a 90 per cent. disaffection trigger. Either 90 per cent. of members of the Assembly or 10 per cent. of the London public would have been able to trigger a recall procedure. We have now arrived at the proposal that commands the greatest confidence. Therefore, it demands more respect and more support, and I hope that it will find favour with hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Today is a test for Labour Back Benchers. Will they always do as their pagers tell them? Will they always be told by Downing street how central, regional and local government should be run? Will they always be merely obedient voting fodder or will they stand up for some sort of democracy in the capital city? Perhaps they will all troop through the Lobby and say, "We're sorry but, on this issue, we cannot afford to protest because that would be too embarrassing." If the three Labour candidates for the mayor of London are conveniently not present so that they do not have to have their votes recorded, we will remind the public of that fact.

Mr. Gapes: What about the Liberal Democrat candidate?

Mr. Hughes: The intelligent Member for somewhere in the east end asks about the Liberal Democrat candidate.

If she were a Member of the House, she would be here. She was selected by one member, one vote; she is not tainted by records from which most people would run a mile and she is not in the middle of an appointment process that has been rigged by Downing street.

Mr. Wilshire: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Hughes: In that process, every debate becomes more incredible—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Member sit down when I am on my feet?

Mr. Wilshire: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier, you correctly advised us that we should not discuss the Labour party and Conservative party candidates for the mayor's job. Does that ruling apply to the Liberal Democrat candidate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would be grateful if candidates were not mentioned in the way that they were earlier. I hope that they will not be mentioned again.

Mr. Hughes: I hear what you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I do not consider such references to be out of order. You are making a request—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member will appreciate that the Chair will decide what is in order.

Mr. Hughes: I hear your request, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I was just wondering what its basis was.

Those of us who have listened to the debates realise—I hope that the Minister does, too—that this vote will be a test of whether we have democratic or autocratic government. If he keeps nailing his colours to the mast of autocratic government, he and the Labour party will live to regret it. It is living to regret it, because the Government's reputation for being autocratic grows every day and their reputation for being democratic diminishes every day. The British public will grow disaffected with the Government probably for that reason as much as any other.

We had a bit of a debate earlier—when the Minister got going—about why we should not have an impeachment provision. A debate on such a provision would have been highly relevant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) has remarked, the argument used against the provision was crass. When we raised the issue in Committee, the Minister said that an impeachment provision would be irrelevant. However, when impeachment proceedings were begun against the current American President, I do not remember anyone saying that there should not be such a facility. It was simply argued that it was inappropriate for the special prosecutor to proceed or for Members of Congress to trigger the proceedings. There lies the rub. Members of Congress may pay the political price and suffer from triggering a procedure that was not in line with the public's view of what was appropriate.

In that case, the need for an impeachment procedure was not questioned. As the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) argued, the other impeachment proceedings that took place in America in the 20th century were necessary to ensure that a President resigned. Impeachment was not carried out, because the President resigned beforehand. However, the fact that he could have been impeached was probably necessary to ensure his resignation. If we do not have the sanction to force the mayor to go during his term of office, we are giving him power the like of which we have never before given to people in British elected public office.

If the Prime Minister is defeated in the House by a majority of one—by 50 per cent. of Members plus one—on a no confidence motion, he or she goes.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): He does not have to.

Mr. Hughes: He does not have to, but, even though we do not have a written constitution, he goes. Lord Callaghan is the last living example of that.

In the Scottish Parliament, it is expressly the case—we debated the matter here—that a vote of no confidence in the Executive leads to their being expected to go. Evidence from the Welsh Assembly suggests that a vote of no confidence—not in the Agriculture and Rural Development Secretary, but in the Executive—would mean that the Executive were expected to go. One can argue that the London Assembly is not the same type of body and that point is relevant because we are dealing with different levels of government. However, it does not make the Minister's argument for him.

Mr. Bermingham: Does not the hon. Gentleman's logic take him to the conclusion that I have reached, which is that, when public opinion, officials and Assembly members have no confidence in the mayor, he or she will go? Let us logically think it through. How can someone perform if everyone is against him? He cannot, and that is why Prime Ministers and Ministers go.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman argues for what most people would expect to be the case. However, under the Bill, if the mayor does not resign, there is nothing that anyone can do.

It is possible that the mayor might not resign. In recent years, mayors elected in the western world, and in cities such as the capital of America, have carried on in office while they were in prison. If the mayor of the capital city of America did not go when confidence was lost in him, there is no evidence to suggest that the mayor of London might.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way shortly.

As the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington pointed out, we as a legislature should not put into place a system that will allow years to pass, something to go wrong and confidence in politicians and London government to be lost before anyone can say, "Now we must do something." It is no good shutting the door after the horse has bolted and saying. "I'm sorry. We forgot to provide for this eventuality." If we do that, people will go to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and tell him that he was warned.

Mr. Bermingham: If a chief executive works for a mayor who has gone completely barmy—I do not mean

[Mr. Bermingham]

mentally, but he behaves absolutely stupidly—the chief executive will simply not do what he is told. The mayor will become ineffective because no one will take instructions from him. What will happen then? The mayor will resign, and that is what happens in the States and elsewhere—they go.

3 pm

Mr. Hughes: First, that did not happen, and it does not always happen, in the United States.

Secondly—as the Minister is constantly at pains to tell us—the office of the London mayor will be different. The Bill will provide for Britain's first mayor to be elected directly by the voters. The mayor would be quite entitled to wave two fingers at the London Executive, Assembly and electorate and say, "I was elected for four years by you lot—I was elected with far more votes than the Prime Minister. I am staying." There has been no precedent for the office, and we must ensure that, in creating it, we do not make a terrible mistake.

Sir Sydney Chapman: The hon. Gentleman has just made the point that I wanted to make. A person who has been elected directly for a fixed term is much more likely to put up the proverbial two fingers to the Assembly. That fact strengthens the case for creating a corrective mechanism.

Mr. Hughes: I think that the hon. Gentlemen and I share exactly the same view on the issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton asked the Minister a very simple factual question. He said, "Minister, you are the one who studied the Bill for a year and piloted it through Parliament, and you are now the campaign manager for the Labour camp. Give us one example of one directly elected mayor in any other city in the world—it does not even have to be a capital city—that has no provision for a recall or no-confidence motion." Answer came there none.

In Committee, we cited the procedures used in St. Louis, Washington, San Francisco and Tokyo. Although they all have different procedures, suited to local circumstances, each of those cities provides for a remedy in dealing with a mayor who goes off the rails. The greater the power that we give to the mayor, the more reason we should have to enable the Assembly to take control of the situation.

The Minister might say that our arguments apply only to the Scottish Parliament and the European Parliament, but they apply also to local government. I have friends who have served in London local councils. Although I have not asked them about it, I am sure that they all believe that the leader of a Liberal Democrat-controlled council would be voted out of office if a majority of council members felt that he or she should not be entitled to continue in office. Council leaders are elected by the council, and they may be removed by the council. There are mechanisms to remove a mayor or council leader everywhere, except in the Bill.

The Government are not offering an alternative proposal. They are not saying, "We don't like the idea of a no-confidence motion being triggered by 19 of the 25 Assembly Members; we want to set the number at 22." The Government are offering no alternatives.

We really must support the Lords amendment, and ask Labour Back Benchers to be braver than they are usually. Not content with a Bill that pretends to give power to London government, but leaves much power in the hands of the Secretary of State; not content with a Bill that, initially, was described as giving regional government to Londoners, but that now is said to create just another form of local council; not content with a system in which Labour Assembly candidates are not elected by London Labour party members, but appointed; not content with a system in which, on instructions from No. 10 Downing street, the mayoral candidate selection process is being fixed; not content with having rigged the candidate selection process in the Labour party from beginning to end, the Government now want us to buy a package in which, for four years, we would not be able to get rid of the person whom they tried to force on us. That would just not be acceptable.

So far, of all the proposals that the Government have made in their two and a half years in office—half of the Parliament—their proposals on the London mayor are the most autocratic.

Although there is a party political reason to have a no-confidence provision, there is also a much more important reason. We are in an age in which every opinion poll states that the public do not have great confidence in politicians. Moreover, the person who currently has the confidence of the greater part of the London electorate may not even be allowed to stand for election. The Government's proposals would undermine London government's ability to have the confidence of the people of London.

It would not be good for London to have a mayor who does not enjoy the support of the people, and it would not be good for London government if the mayor and the Assembly had no confidence in each other. As the Minister said, one Authority will be composed of two parts. If the two halves of the same Authority have no confidence in each other, London government will not operate effectively.

Regardless of our disagreements on how much power the mayor and the Assembly should each have, if we want the mayor and Assembly to work well together in doing their job, we shall have to allow the Assembly to force out a mayor who does not enjoy the Assembly's confidence—which may have been lost because of corruption, laziness, illness, arrogance, or personality and performance in office. I shall give one example.

People should be regarded as innocent until they have been found guilty. Let us imagine—I have no one specifically in mind—that a London mayor is being investigated on serious financial allegations. Perfectly properly, he or she might say, "I have not been found guilty. I am defending my case and arguing that I am not guilty. I want to stay in office." Regardless of the truth of the allegations, would it be good for London—the world's financial capital—to have a mayor who, perhaps for two or three years, was being investigated?

Mr. Hill: There was no truth in the allegations?

Mr. Hughes: Not at all; and the mayor would be absolutely right in saying, "I am not guilty." However, would it be in the best interests of London government for the mayor to stay in office throughout those

investigations? *[Interruption.]* The Ministers say yes, but previous Ministers have not always taken that view. Even allegations undermine confidence. We have to foresee a situation in which the greater interest dictates that someone should step aside, regardless of their view on their own performance.

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Gentleman is making a common-sense point. Creating a no-confidence provision would give the Assembly the power to decide whether to exercise it. The Assembly might take the view that allegations being peddled about a mayor are nothing more than rumour, gossip and innuendo, and are therefore valueless. If so, the Assembly would not be compelled to pursue a vote of no confidence. Nevertheless, such a provision would invest in Assembly Members the trust to act with due diligence.

Mr. Hughes: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Additionally, between 75 and 80 per cent. of Assembly Members would have to decide the matter. I cannot imagine a London electoral result—it has not happened this century—in which 75 per cent. of electors vote for people from the same party. Therefore, a decision to pass a no-confidence motion would have to be taken by Members of two or more parties.

Assembly Members would also be aware that they would have to account to their electorate for their decision to get rid of a mayor. As the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) said, if they act irresponsibly in voting for such a motion, their electorate probably would not take a favourable view of it.

Mr. McDonnell: The hon. Gentleman was unusually disparaging about my earlier remarks. Nevertheless, we are now debating the key issue of natural justice, which we shall have to resolve. If allegations have been made against someone, should he or she immediately be penalised because of them, before a full investigation has been conducted to determine the truth?

A number of us—including the hon. Gentleman—have dealt with miscarriages of justice cases, in which it has been discovered that, because of the failure of an investigation, the climate of the hunt has led to someone being pilloried and removed from a position, despite subsequently being found innocent. The issue of whether there should be a suspension mechanism, rather than a rejection mechanism, must be reviewed as we have not yet found the appropriate mechanism.

Mr. Hughes: I always try not to be disparaging about the hon. Gentleman. There may be arguments for suspension, but if the Bill receives Royal Assent with no such provision, the press—not the elected Members of the Assembly—will decide whether the mayor resigns in the event of a serious allegation. I would far rather that 80 per cent. of the Assembly, rather than the press, decided.

I wish to strengthen the point made by the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet, who is an experienced London colleague. Let me be modest about my colleagues. Let us imagine that a Liberal Democrat mayor is elected next May, as we increasingly expect. Let us imagine that a Liberal Democrat mayor comes to office with huge support from the London electorate, as is increasingly possible. Let us imagine that we do not sweep the board in the Assembly, and that there is a coalition of 19 members coming from the other parties, while we have all the others. If those 19 vindictively and conspiratorially decided that the best form of government was not available to Londoners and that they wanted to vote out the Liberal Democrat mayor, the point made by the hon. Gentleman is the answer.

If they did so, the candidate could stand again—and probably would, depending on the party's view. However, the electorate would decide both on that candidate and on the people who got rid of the mayor. The history of this place shows that when, for other reasons, it kicked out people such as Bradlaugh, the electorate sent them back. In the end, the electorate won the day.

If we want to improve confidence in public life, the amendment must be accepted. It may not be the amendment that my colleagues and I would have wanted to table, nor is it theoretically the best in the world. It is not the amendment that we might have had had a royal commission inquired into the matter in five years' time. It is not even the amendment that the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington might have come up with after reflection and consultation. However, at the moment, it is this or nothing.

If the Government turn this amendment down today, they will send the message that they want the office of mayor of London to be more autocratic than any other position in British constitutional life. They will want to give the mayor more power, and others less control over the mayor.

I hope that the House will support the amendment that was passed by nearly two to one in the Lords. If this place reverses the amendment, I hope that the Lords make one last stand—some of them have not much more to lose. If they go out for the last time next week, it is better that they do so with a bang than a whimper. They could do no better service than to say to the Government that there will be a power for Londoners to have a no confidence vote in their mayor and to get rid of him if that is appropriate.

I hope that we overturn the Government's view and support the Lords. If not, I hope that the Lords make certain that the amendment is still in the Bill next week.

3.15 pm

Mr. Gapes: I am grateful to be called at this point in the debate, as it is always a pleasure to follow the sanctimonious nonsense of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I and others had to sit in Committee through hours and hours of it, and we have just had another example from the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey talks about democracy, and then invokes the hereditary peers as a means of defeating the democratically elected Government—a Government elected on a mandate to establish the mayor and Assembly. He says that, if the democratic decision of this House goes once more for the Government's proposal, the hereditaries and his friends in the Conservative party in the House of Lords should vote down a democratically elected Government. So much for the democracy of the Liberal Democrats.

[Mr. Gapes]

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey talks about the public not having much confidence in politicians. They certainly do not have much confidence in Liberal Democrat politicians—that is why the party only gets 11 per cent. in the opinion polls, and why there are only 46 of them in this democratic place. They may have more in the House of Lords at the moment, but they do not have democratic support in the country.

I wish to refer to the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward), who is not here at this moment. I must say that I preferred the approach in Committee of the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). The hon. Member for Witney cast a series of slurs and smears at Labour politicians and others unable to answer them. If that is the way the Conservative party intends to fight the Assembly and mayoral elections, we will have the dirtiest election campaign that this city has ever seen.

I hope that the Conservatives think carefully before going down that road, as those who live in glass houses should be careful when they start throwing stones. I suspect that it would rebound against the Conservatives—and their candidate for mayor—among the general public.

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) was entirely open handed in terms of the strictures that he raised, and he referred to the conduct of the London borough of Camden between 1965 and 1975. Between 1968 and 1971, the Conservative party was in control of the London borough of Camden, and I was a member of it. Although I did not intervene on my hon. Friend to say that I resented his strictures, I do not think that he can remotely be described as having cast slurs.

Mr. Gapes: As always, we benefit from the great advice and sagacity of the right hon. Gentleman, who entertains us with his insights into politics. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Witney has come back into the Chamber, and I hope that he heard what his right hon. Friend said.

Clearly, we are involved in a new concept, and we are employing two different electoral systems, neither of which is used for the election of local councillors or Members of Parliament. The system for electing the mayor is the supplementary vote, which means that whoever is elected as mayor of our city will have a substantial first preference and a large second preference, giving them the support of more than half the people of our city.

Members of the Greater London Authority will include people who—for the information of Liberal Democrat Members—have been democratically selected by the Labour party. That process included ballots in borough pairings to select candidates for the 14 constituencies, such as the one in Redbridge and Havering, in which Labour party members voted overwhelmingly for our candidate, and selection for the top-up party list, which will be used if we do not win many seats. I suspect that we will not need many people on our top-up list, because we shall win many of those constituencies. However, all parties will probably benefit from the top-up.

The Greater London Authority will also include members who, given that they pass the threshold of 5 per cent., will have received very few votes. That is presumably how the two or three Liberal Democrat members of the authority will be elected. Although they may win one or two seats, they will be reliant, to some extent, on the top-up list. Such members will not have received a great personal vote; they will have been elected by virtue of their place on the party list.

So the mayor's democratic mandate will be different from that of the 25 authority members. Yet the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition proposes that 19 of the 25 members should have the ability to remove from office somebody who might have secured the votes of 1 million, 2 million or more Londoners—by methods that could be subject to political intrigue reminiscent of the behaviour of Republicans in the United States.

It is a pity that the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) is not present. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I do not know where he is—probably issuing press releases that attack Labour Members of Parliament, as he did in my constituency this week. In 1981, when the Labour party won the Greater London Council election, the leader of the Labour group was Andrew McIntosh—now Lord McIntosh. After that election, there was a coup, and the hon. Member for Brent, East became leader of the council by a majority vote in the Labour group. That happens in other parties from time to time, too. I remember that the Conservative party in the GLC also changed its leader through an internal coup.

Such a model is appropriate when all members of the authority are elected on the same basis, and when the leader of the authority is from that common electoral college. However, once a mayor is elected by direct mandate, the whole system changes. It is difficult to understand why the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives are in league on a proposal that will allow them to manipulate a coup against a democratically elected Labour mayor, without any democratic sanction by the public.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am grateful to my former pair for giving way. It is always a coup when one is on the losing side. Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that he has stumbled on the point of the debate? Under the traditional model that he has described, a coup, or house-cleaning, can always occur by a vote of the democratically elected members who originally elected the leader or mayor. However, that does not apply here because the Government have chosen a system of two separate mandates. There is therefore no mechanism for dealing with the Mayor Barry factor. Will the hon. Gentleman address that point?

Mr. Gapes: I am happy to do so. The Conservative party opposed the concept of a Greater London Authority; it wanted only a directly elected mayor. I would be interested in its proposals for removing a mayor without an Assembly. Would it be done by osmosis or extrasensory perception? The Conservatives have obviously changed their position.

Mr. Bermingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that those who support the amendment base their argument on

a two-tier democracy: the populace will elect the mayor and those who have been elected will deselect the mayor? That is nonsense and a contradiction.

Mr. Gapes: As my hon. Friend says, if the public have elected the mayor, they should be able to remove the mayor. It would be wrong to provide that those who are elected on a different mandate can remove the mayor.

I have some sympathy with the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) that there should be a review. The system is new, and there may be lessons that we can learn from London and other cities over the coming years. However, the proposal that we are considering is dangerous. Given the nature of politics and the views that have been expressed in the debate, the provision could be used maliciously for party political ends. It is not in the interests of London, Londoners or our mayoral system.

Mr. Randall: Logic is not one of the hon. Gentleman's strong points, but perhaps he recalls that, during the many happy hours in Committee, the Conservative party proposed that the populace, as he puts it, could remove the mayor by petition. Given his reasons for opposing Lords amendment No. 1., why did he vote against our proposal?

Mr. Gapes: I did so for the good reason that a petition signed by Mickey Mouse or Colonel Blimp, or whoever the Conservative party puts up, is not the best way forward. "Petitionitis" politics, which is more typical of the anoraks on the Liberal Democrat Benches than the Conservative party, is not the way forward.

Mr. McDonnell: Speaking as someone who was there during the GLC period, coups or not, I can inform the House that a petition was presented to the House, asking the previous Government to abandon their abolition proposals. The Conservative party ignored that petition. It is therefore ironic that it is now calling for petitions. I went through the petition personally to remove all the Mickey Mouse and Ronald Reagan signatories. It was a genuine petition, organised in order to preserve the GLC, which the Conservatives ignored.

Mr. Gapes: I am grateful for that information. I remember banging on doors in my hon. Friend's constituency to get him re-elected—in a campaign of which the Conservatives thought so much they did not even put up candidates.

I shall not delay the House any longer. *[Interruption.]* I might speak again later, if hon. Members want me to do so. I hope that the House votes against Lords amendment No. 1 and supports the Government.

Mr. Ottaway: We are discussing how an unfit mayor can be removed from office. I agree with the Minister—the locum for this afternoon—that the amendment does not provide the right way of doing it. With only 19 people having the matter in the palm of their hand, it would be too easy for the mayor to manipulate them. One could easily buy off eight or 10 people. It would also be possible for political parties to gang up against an independent mayor—there could quite easily be one—for purely political reasons rather than because he was unfit.

3.30 pm

That, however, is the limit of my agreement with the Minister. I believe that the amendment is right in principle. As my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) said, we proposed in Committee a recall petition. There are many other approaches—there are a lot of ways of skinning a cat—but if one is considering the fundamental issue of the mayor's competence to do the job for which he was elected, the fact that half a million people agree about his not being up to it and that the principle is enshrined in legislation should be good enough to force the mayor to submit himself to re-election or to stand down.

That principle is widely used in the United States of America, where there are directly elected mayors, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said. The Government, however, propose that there should be no principle whatever. A local authority can dismiss its leader with no trouble at all. We had the example of the coup led by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) against Lord McIntosh after the 1981 election—when my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) was a candidate, I believe.

It is easy to remove a sitting leader. The Prime Minister can be removed. Lord Callaghan was removed by the House of Commons and Baroness Thatcher by her own party. In Europe, the Commission was effectively sacked, although its members chose to resign. In the United States, President Clinton survived the impeachment proceedings and President Nixon decided that he could not survive the Watergate proceedings.

Those were principles enshrined in legislation for the good of the Executive, but there is nothing comparable in the Bill. The Assembly could be unanimous—that had no effect in Wales, when the Agriculture Minister was censured—and there could be unanimous motions of both Houses of Parliament, and indeed every psychiatrist in Harley street could declare the mayor insane, but nothing could be done about it. That is a matter for grave concern.

There are proposals in the local government White Paper for directly elected mayors for councils. I believe that surveys show that nearly 90 per cent. of councils are against the proposals, because they know that they will not be able to get rid of the bloke if they lose confidence in him.

The Minister spoke of two principles allowing the mayor the authority to continue. The first was his electoral mandate. That is not a good enough reason, as a mayor could come to office on the crest of a wave, squeaky clean, and incidents could happen thereafter. I thought that the Minister was going to say that there are no fewer than 270 powers reserved to the Secretary of State in the Bill. The Government are so worried that the hon. Member for Brent, East might be elected that we called those provisions Livingstone clauses. The Minister then said that the Assembly had powers to scrutinise, to highlight and to veto the budget. Those powers could not deal with a corrupt mayor. I believe the point about the mandate to be irrelevant and disingenuous.

The Minister's second point was that there were provisions for conditions in which an unfit mayor could be removed. One of those was if the mayor is convicted and sentenced to three months or more in prison. That is a pretty unlikely scenario. For a start, it could take a year

[Mr. Ottaway]

or more to convict the mayor, and he could continue in office during that time. There is a huge credibility gap in the principles outlined by the Minister.

I spoke earlier of Ministers who had resigned during this Parliament. One resigned as a result of an error of judgment on Clapham common—that was not a criminal offence, so there was no question of a conviction—and another resigned because he failed to disclose a loan from a building society while his own Department was investigating the man who had made him another loan. Comparable circumstances would be justification for the mayor to be declared unfit for office, but the difference is that the Ministers resigned because they knew that they would otherwise be sacked, but the mayor is untouchable and could not be sacked.

One could come up with numerous examples of people being unfit but having the power to continue. In my judgment, a mayor should not have powers without checks and balances. No mayor should be able to continue unchecked, and the Government do not have the right to do what is wrong.

Mr. Bermingham: I did not serve in Committee on the Bill but I have listened to the arguments on whether the ultimate sanction of giving the Assembly the power to dismiss the mayor should be in the Bill. The arguments in favour are superficially attractive but do not take us very far. To put it mildly, such a sanction is unfair. The mayor is elected by the electorate of the whole city and serves for four years. He has certain powers and employs certain people: the council employees, presumably, who will run the authority. This massive Bill, which has changed shape several times as I have followed its progress from a distance, sets the precedent for the major cities of Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield, so one wants to see how it will develop.

Should the ultimate sanction be in the hands of the Assembly or of the electorate? I say the latter: he who gives must have the power to take away. The Assembly is elected on a different franchise and serves in a different way. One can foresee a wholly independent mayor faced with an Assembly, elected in the two-stage process of constituency members and top-up members, that does not like him. Under the amendment, that Assembly could dismiss that independent, elected mayor. That would not be right. The argument would then, of course, be that the electorate could do something in due course—but that would create a hiatus and a period of disturbance.

The other side of the argument asks the question, "What if we have a wrong 'un as mayor?" Bringing in personalities would do the argument no service, so leaving out all such arguments, why would we want to get rid of a mayor? If he had gone mad, section 28 and the other restraining sections of the Mental Health Act 1983 would give us more than enough powers to certify him, and that would take him out, just as it would anybody else in public office—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) says that does not work in here. I have thought about that on many occasions, but I have never had the courage to find two psychiatrists to certify the many Ministers, regardless of political party, whom I have wanted to have certified over the years. If I had had the courage to do so, I might have been able to prove that the mechanism worked here.

If a person is in prison for three months or more, that person is pretty obviously a crook. Of course, people have to face the allegations and the horrendous "News of the Screws" exposés that are published against politicians of all parties all the time. The mud sometimes sticks—although some of it is totally unjustified, and the beneficiary usually walks away clinking the coins in his pocket for the rest of his life. We have the sanction, the counter-sanction and the remedy.

What would a mayor have to do for people to want to throw him out? Probably he would have to be incompetent. That is probably the mischief that the amendment seeks to chase, but it is not needed. If a mayor is incompetent, that starts to show up, as it does when a council leader loses his or her way. Fellow councillors begin to notice and worry about it, as do the chief executive and the employees. Once the chief executive and the other employees begin to see that someone has lost the plot, they begin to react, and the press begins to publish.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman accept the fact that, as far as I know, all forms of local government have an annual meeting, and the leaders, the mayors and the other office bearers are elected annually? There is an annual sanction against somebody who does not want to go. However, with the London mayor there is only a four yearly sanction, and someone can do a lot of damage in three years.

Mr. Bermingham: I served on a council that threw the leader out half way through the year—or perhaps that happened just after my time. That has happened on many authorities.

At local government level the sanction is always there. With the new Assembly and the new mayor, people might be after the mayor simply because he was incompetent. When I intervened earlier in the speech by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—I thank the hon. Gentleman for letting me do so—I was trying to point out that the pressure of public opinion often drives out incompetents.

I rely on the Minister to correct me later if I am wrong, but I think that under the Bill, once that degree of incompetence builds up and is demonstrated, the executive and the Assembly will have the power to isolate the wrong decisions made by the mayor. The mayor does not personally go down and run the tube trains or exercise the various economic powers. He employs people to do that for him and follow his instructions.

Local government employees in general are liable and can be sued for negligence if they wilfully follow a path that they know to be contrary to the interests of the local authority. As I understand the Bill, the employees of the Assembly of the Greater London Authority are also in that position. If I am wrong, most of what I have said in the past few minutes is rubbish, but if I am right, the sanction and the corrective are there.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): One of the problems with the hon. Gentleman's line of argument is that many of the people who will be discharging the functions of the mayor will have been appointed by the mayor—such as the chairmen of the boards, the members of the executive boards that will discharge and oversee

the works, and the deputy mayor. All the people who the hon. Gentleman says would turn against the mayor are the mayor's place persons.

Mr. Bermingham: The chief executives of Sheffield city council and Birmingham city council are appointed by the committees of the council, but they are employees of the councils themselves. The same is true of the Assembly. The mayor may select the employees, but the employees are employed by the authority. Therefore the rules on negligent behaviour apply equally to them.

Much as one would like to think that this world is full of cronies, it is not. A good employer employs the best people, and I would be staggered if the employees of the Assembly were not thought to be the best that could be found. The Assembly will not go in for jobs for the boys and girls. If it does, the fiercest of all rows will break out in this place. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) might be the first on his feet screaming about what had happened, but he would probably lose the race by about 30 seconds to me, because I would be here screaming even more loudly.

Mr. Burstow: But when the Bill becomes an Act, speaking in this place will not enable us to get the mayor to resign on such grounds—unless we legislate again.

Mr. Bermingham: Then I go back to the old saying about the fuel of publicity. I finish where I started. This is not a necessary amendment; powers exist and the remedies are there, so the Bill does not need it.

3.45 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman: We are discussing two of the 820 Lords amendments that we have to deal with, and the Leader of the House told us earlier that she intended to introduce a guillotine some time on Monday. I realise that trying to deal with all those amendments is trying to put a gallon into a thimble, but it would still be helpful for the House to know the size of the thimble. Do the Government intend the guillotine to fall at 7 o'clock on Monday, or 10 o'clock? That could be the difference between having nine hours to discuss the amendments and having 12 hours. The Government at least owe it to democracy in some form to let us know how long we will have. I have a high regard for the Minister, and I hope that he will tell us as soon as possible.

Mr. Simon Hughes: May I help the hon. Gentleman? My understanding is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We are dealing with one group of amendments. It is not our concern now to worry about what we have done or failed to do. We can concern ourselves only with the amendments before us.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I entirely accept what you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I think that I made an important point.

I support Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 6, and will therefore vote against the Government motions to disagree. I accept, however, that this is a question of balance. I served on the Standing Committee, and I think that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) who introduced the amendment for a call-in petition. I followed his arguments closely, but I have had time to reflect on our debates in Committee, and I now veer towards saying that a vote of no confidence would be a better and more practical method than a call-in petition.

I do not need to go into all the detail, but although when we are dealing with such matters the expense is not the only consideration, I now believe that the mechanisms and the expense would be somewhat cumbersome and arbitrary.

I can be much briefer than I originally intended now, because most of the points have already been made and I can simply allude to them. It is true that the mayor and the Assembly will have separate powers and responsibilities, but they will be interactive. For example, the Assembly is responsible for scrutinising the mayor's decisions and actions. To put it another way, it will be the duty of the Assembly to hold the mayor to account for his actions.

The Bill will create a precedent and will possibly be a model for extending to other cities the principle of elected mayors. Therefore, we owe it to the country, let alone Londoners, to get this issue right. There are two options for removing the mayor—the first is by petition and the other is by a vote of no confidence. I prefer the latter.

We can argue about the number of votes that would be needed for a no confidence motion to be successful. Personally, I would not favour a requirement for fewer than 19 of the 25 members of the Assembly. I would also not favour a requirement for unanimity, because the mayor will appoint the deputy mayor, who might feel that he owes an especial loyalty to the mayor. Whether the figure is 19, 20, 21 or 22 is a matter for debate.

Serious charges could be made against the mayor that are not covered by section 28 of the Mental Health Act 1959—I know that the Minister is more familiar with section 106 agreements and town and country planning legislation—but that would require the mayor to resign in the interests of Londoners. Clauses 13 and 14 cover the issue, but in the case of clause 13 only if the mayor fails to attend six consecutive meetings of the Assembly. Clause 14 covers criminal offences.

Parallels exist abroad for ways to deal with the matter. The mayor will have a high profile and a dominant personality, at least within greater London, and the safeguard against the abuse of an option to remove him through a vote of no confidence supported by at least 75 per cent. of members of the Assembly is the good sense and political intuition of Londoners. Given the fragility of my majority, I wish to point out that all my constituents are extremely sensible and politically "with it". However, that might explain why I have only a wafer-thin majority.

I commend the Lords amendments to the House and I hope that Labour Members will realise that they are not a cobbled-together machination between the two main Opposition parties. I believe that hon. Members on both sides of the House genuinely believe that this issue should be tackled.

Mr. Edward Davey: It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), who makes his case forcefully. I agree with everything that he said. It is a pleasure also to be able to welcome

[Mr. Edward Davey]

the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who is now in his place; I wonder whether he will give the House his views on the amendment. I hope that he will tell the House that, if he were to be elected to the great office of mayor, he would not be afraid of democratic censure. I hope that he feels that he would be able to meet any vote in the Assembly by argument and would not need statutory protection against a vote of censure.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) is unfortunately no longer in his place, but he made an important point when he said that the Lords amendment was not needed because the power of the press and public pressure could be used to keep the mayor in line. The reality is that however the press attack the mayor—and whatever views the Assembly members or employees have of the mayor—he can still refuse to go. That is the whole point of the amendment. However much bile is poured on the mayor by the press, he can stay put.

If the amendment is not accepted, the danger is that the mayor may be the subject of a groundless attack but would have no protection. The amendment would ensure that a tabloid-led campaign to try to get rid of a mayor who had done nothing wrong could be answered by Assembly members who, by defeating a vote of no confidence, could say, "Case not proven." It would provide protection against scurrilous press campaigns against a democratically elected politician and as such the Government should support it.

The main reason why the Government should support the amendment is because of its effects on the Brent, East question. We have had the West Lothian question in connection with the Scottish Parliament, we have had the Cardiff, West question in connection with the Welsh Assembly and now we have the Brent, East question. I submit that the Lords amendment would provide a solution to the Brent, East question. It would help to solve the Government's Ken conundrum. Even at this late stage and given their problems in this area, they would be wise to consider whether the amendment might help them to dig themselves out of the hole that they are in.

The Brent, East question is a problem for the Government, whose reasoning is, "If Ken is not on the ballot paper, Labour party members and Londoners will hate us, but if he is, he may win and embarrass us." If one considers those two dangerous outcomes for the Government, one can see why the amendments would be in the Labour party's interest. The option of keeping the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) off the ballot paper is a lose-lose situation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not going to discuss selections or ballot papers, because my understanding of the amendment is that it covers the situation after the mayor is elected. The hon. Gentleman should keep to that issue.

Mr. Davey: My remarks are aimed at ensuring that the mayor will be democratically held to account and that the Government accept the measure that will assist that process. If the hon. Member for Brent, East were not on the ballot paper, the Government would be in a lose-lose situation after the election. They would have alienated their party in London, and Londoners. If the hon. Gentleman decided to run as an independent candidate, the Government would still lose out. However, it seems as though the Government will pursue that lose-lose situation.

If the Government were to accept the amendment and allow Londoners and the GLA Assembly the ability to ensure democratic accountability, that would be a win-win situation. If the hon. Member for Brent, East were to be allowed to stand and became the mayor, the outbreak of democracy would curry favour with the London Labour party—a win for the Government. It would restore credibility to the Labour party's proposals among the electorate—another win—and even if the hon. Gentleman were elected, the Assembly could keep him in check. That is the answer to the Brent, East question and the way out of the Government's hole. Assuming the role of a political risk analyst, I offer that last-minute solution to the Government. The argument may not persuade Liberal Democrat Members, as it is not in our interests to help the Government get out of the hole, but I occasionally like to be helpful.

4 pm

Mr. McDonnell: I wish to raise a point with the hon. Gentleman, really out of a personal grudge. He is concerned about democratic accountability, but why was he absent when the House voted on the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill the other night? Why was his—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going far too wide of the amendment.

Mr. Davey: Although I am tempted, I know that you would rule me out of order if I responded to the hon. Gentleman now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall be more than happy to speak to him afterwards.

The Government have put forward against the amendment no concrete, constitutional argument that holds water. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, we are used to votes of no confidence in British political institutions—that is how our various democratic institutions have evolved. However, the change introduced by the Bill is that that is not to be allowed in the new GLA. The Government may well say that that is the point: the GLA is a new body, so it is right that it be different from the institutions that have existed before.

Given the shenanigans that are going on, that is a doubtful claim, but let us take it at face value. When I asked the Minister whether the Government had learned from the experience in other countries and cities when they adopted this new model, he was unable to give me a single example from elsewhere in the world of the new type of institution that the Government want to introduce into Britain that did not have a democratic safeguard.

That failure speaks volumes. I should be more than happy to give way to the Minister if he would like to intervene with an example of the sort that I seek. However, the fact that he does not want to intervene suggests that no such example exists.

Therefore, the Government will be introducing a unique form of mayoral government, which has never been experienced before. Again, the Government might claim that they have designed a new form of Government that

has been tailored especially to London's unique features. We heard various weak arguments like that during the Committee proceedings.

However, it is odd that, at the end of the 20th century, Britain's new Labour Government should be able to find a new form of democracy that has not been invented before. In that form of democracy, a great deal of power will reside in one person's hands but cannot be checked by a democratically elected body between elections.

What is so unique about the new authority and about London's political culture that would justify that lack of democratic accountability? What can explain the Government's position? So far, they have offered no explanation themselves, so I shall hypothesise.

Perhaps the answer has to do with the powers of the Secretary of State. Those hon. Members who have been involved with the Bill all the way through got used to the assertion that the Secretary of State should have reserve powers to prevent the mayor from doing things that the Government of the day did not like. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions was not voted into office by Londoners, so it would not be democratic to allow him oversight of the mayor's activities.

However, the problem is worse than that: in the case that we are debating today, those powers do not even exist. The Government have not performed even their usual trick and reserved for the Secretary of State the power to kick out the mayor. I hasten to add that I do not suggest that they should do that, as that would really expose the weaknesses and undemocratic nature of the institutions that the Government are establishing, but the logic of such an approach is typical of their attitude to other elements of the Bill.

When this amendment was debated in another place, it was argued that the fierce nature of party politics could lead to gridlock. It was stated that parties could gang up on the mayor, and that the repeated hiatuses so caused would render the new Authority unable to govern London properly.

The proposal to impose democratic accountability takes account of that problem because it is based on a qualified majority. I would encourage the Government if they were to argue that that qualified majority should be higher. That would be a fair argument, but the point is that such devices exist to prevent procedural abuses that could render institutions powerless. The Government could bring forward their own device, and the fact that they have not is incredibly worrying.

It is odd that a mayor should be allowed to continue if he or she were unable to command the support of only seven or more Assembly members. It would be bizarre for a mayor to have so little support. I doubt that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras would be happy if he could not rely on the support of at least seven Authority members so that he could stay on as mayor.

I fear that the Government's opposition to the amendment is based on their conviction, when they put the Bill together, that their candidate was certain to win. They believed that the mayor would be one of theirs—a Labour party member who was signed up to the new, Blairite project, so they did not worry about putting in place the safeguards that we have discussed. However, events have shown the error of the Government's original thinking. By now—after the experiences in Wales and Scotland—one would have thought that the Government would have learned from their mistakes and looked for another solution.

Although the Government appear to be trying to rig procedures and prevent other people from standing, recent history should have told them that the best laid plans can go awry. I suggest that the Government find a new faith and trust in democracy. They should not allow the mayor of London to be an untouchable, but should make sure that he or she can be brought to account.

Mr. Keith Darvill (Upminster): I shall keep my remarks brief. This debate has been similar to the debate in Committee on the same subject. Disappointingly, in their support for the amendment, Liberal Democrat and Conservative Members have concentrated on narrow party political issues rather than on the issue that we are discussing.

Throughout the consideration of the Bill, the Opposition have often appeared to misunderstand the nature of the balance between the Assembly and the mayor. That misunderstanding was evident again in the contribution from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey).

Clause 14 sets out a number of ways in which the mayor could be removed. Additional powers are available if the mayor were to act ultra vires, and my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) did the House a service when he referred to them.

Two methods of removing the mayor have been considered—by petition or by vote of confidence. What are the respective benefits of those systems? Clearly, the House of Lords has not considered the petition option suggested in Committee by Conservative Members. The debate in Committee exposed the several disefficiencies involved in having a petition and a recall.

By contrast, one has to ask whether a confidence motion, such as we are considering this evening, would mean that Assembly members would in effect take away from the mayor the authority and the mandate that he or she received from the population of London. Given that such a change of power would be quite possible, the confidence motion option would be unfair. The House must therefore consider whether the Bill would give the proposed Assembly sufficient powers to protect Londoners. My view is that there are—not only are there the powers set out in clause 14 and the other statutory provisions, but there is the power of the Assembly to challenge the mayor and his strategy in a number of ways, and the power to examine the financial settlement. Those are the considerable powers that will be open to the Assembly, as well as public debate.

Mr. Randall: I agree that we should be looking at the principle. Would the hon. Gentleman support the principle that the people of London should be able to remove the mayor in office? If so, that is the case that the Minister made in Committee.

Mr. Darvill: If one supports that principle—the Conservatives have advanced it only through a recall petition—one must consider and debate the number of signatures that would be required for the recall and how one would authenticate the petition. There are massive practical difficulties. The hon. Gentleman asked whether

[Mr. Darvill]

I am in favour in principle, but the principle has to be backed up by the practicality of putting that into effect in legislation. On balance, my view is that such legislation would be unwieldy. It would certainly lead to the destabilisation of the mayoralty and the governance of London so it would hinder the governance of London.

Mr. Randall: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman will agree, but I find it disappointing that despite the length of time that has been spent on the Bill—it has been Labour party policy for some time—a suitable method has not yet been thought of and that is why it will not be included in the legislation. Although the hon. Gentleman does not agree with some of the suggestions, does he agree that there should be some mechanism for removing the mayor and that we should have had something by now?

Mr. Darvill: With respect, there are ways in which the mayor could be disqualified. Many hon. Members have made no reference to those provisions in advancing their ideas. Some scurrilous attacks have been made on various people, but that is no justification. When one looks at the debit and credit columns of the argument, one has to take into account all the credits and then see whether there is a weakness.

There is no perfect constitution. There is always a balance between democracy and the ability to govern, whether in a country, a region or a city. There has to be that balance. In this proposal for an elected mayor and Assembly, we are for the first time vesting executive power in a mayor. If that mayor is to operate properly, he or she cannot constantly be open to a vote of confidence. The Bill provides that the mayor will go up for election every four years and that seems sufficient. For that reason, I urge the House to reject the Lords amendments.

4.15 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I do not represent Greater London so I hesitate to take part in this debate, but it is an important constitutional matter. We are creating a uniquely powerful post. For some years I was both a London borough councillor and a member of the Greater London council—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] Before my hon. Friends cheer too much, I should say that I voted against the abolition of the GLC. I also voted against the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill earlier this week, as I did not consider it sufficiently democratic. Therefore, I have some credentials in arguing for a democratic framework for Greater London government.

We are creating an extraordinarily powerful post. People are only just waking up to how influential the mayor will be. Ultimately, the Government will always be able to control the purse strings, but the mayor will be the only official to be elected by 8 million people. Therefore, he or she will have an enormous reservoir of political influence, and that may explain what is happening in the Labour party. The person who is finally elected to be mayor of London in the spring may well be either an independent candidate or a candidate who is independent of the Government albeit of the same party, without getting into the question of personalities. So there is room for enormous political controversy. That is why I support the Government to a certain extent on this amendment. We are creating a unique institution.

I accept the Government's argument that the mayor will be elected by a certain form of representation—voting—and the Assembly will be elected completely differently. We do not want to create a situation in which there is constant controversy and members of the Assembly feel that if a certain number of them gang up—whether 10, 15 or even 19—they can remove the mayor. I have considerable sympathy with the Government's view. We want the mayor to have the powers and the political independence, not to feel that he is the plaything of politicians. To that extent, I accept what the Minister has said.

I also agree with some of the arguments made in the debate. There is no perfect way to remove a directly elected official. The Minister is on weaker ground as regards the experience in the rest of the world. As numerous contributors to the debate have said, there is no example of any directly elected official, as far as I am aware—whether a president or a mayor—who cannot be removed by a democratic assembly. That is a matter of some concern.

Incidentally, I do not think that this situation is likely to arise. We have heard amusing comments about the mayor going insane or spending three months in prison, but that is unlikely. There has been some criticism of the candidates. We have one distinguished representative sitting in the Chamber. No one is seriously suggesting that he will go bonkers, whatever he may think of his opponents or potential opponents. That is not going to happen.

We all know the arithmetic in the House. The Government will get their way tonight and the amendment will go crashing down to defeat. That is the way the House works. The Minister is a fair-minded man and we much admire the way in which he has piloted this legislation through the House. I hope that he thinks that fair arguments have been made in this long debate, which we could mull over if we were thinking of creating mayors in other cities or if we revisited the legislation.

One could envisage a situation not in which the mayor is deemed to be insane under the Mental Health Acts or convicted of an offence, but in which London or any great city becomes ungovernable and the mayor for some reason simply loses the confidence of the people—we have heard the Mayor Barry example several times during the debate. There is no mechanism to deal with that.

Since the 18th century, when people have devised new constitutions they have always created systems in which there is a division of powers. Basically, there is always an executive or an executive office, a legislative office and a judicial office. There is a separation of powers between the three. All constitutions have some mechanism for legislators who are elected by the people to remove a chief executive who loses the confidence of the people for whatever reason.

In introducing the debate, the Minister alluded to the impeachment trial of President Clinton. He said that it was an abuse and that it showed how impeachment could be misused. As he knows, the American Senate rose above party politics. Although it was Republican dominated, it decided that there was no case for impeaching the President on the basis of high crimes and misdemeanours. Any directly elected assembly can rise above politics when dealing with such a situation. As far as I know, no American President has been successfully impeached.

President Nixon resigned before the process started, President Clinton was not impeached and, in the previous century, President Jackson survived the trial.

Although all types of impeachment have their faults, surely it should be possible for the House to develop some mechanism, whether a recall procedure, a petition or a procedure by which a large portion of the Assembly has to vote for impeachment or no confidence or establish their case. Surely we are capable of developing some means by which a person in what will be a uniquely powerful directly elected office can be removed. That is all that we are asking, and the debate has proved that it is possible.

Mr. Wilshire: I am not wedded to this amendment, but we must have some provision to achieve what it attempts to do. It has been said that all the contributions from Opposition Members have sounded party political. Rather than joining in a party kick-about, I wish to focus on matters of principle to try and clarify the situation and thus persuade Labour Members to see the merits of our very valid case.

I consider the debate to be about accountability, and I suspect that most hon. Members would agree. Accountability and democracy are not the same thing, but the words have been used interchangeably by most previous speakers. One does not have to be elected to be accountable; even political accountability does not flow directly from the method of election, as some Labour Members have argued. Political accountability exists as a matter of principle, irrespective of the method of election. Even if we concede that there is an indirect link between accountability and the method of election and democracy, the link is not as simple as some have suggested.

The Minister stressed in his opening remarks—others have echoed the point—that there is direct political accountability between the post of mayor and the people of London. That may be stating the obvious, but it does not help us understand why an amendment of this sort is needed. Direct accountability between the mayor and the electors of London is as simple as the Minister wants us to believe only if there is no link of any sort to an Assembly. Once an Assembly is introduced, as the Bill provides, there is direct accountability between the mayor and the Assembly. There is no point in saying that it is nothing to do with the Assembly and that the Assembly will somehow trample on the mayor's accountability to the people of London. That is to misunderstand the concept of accountability and the political process.

We need to define accountability. A simple description that is frequently used is that it means hiring and firing. That is not necessarily the best definition, but as it always comes to mind, it is worth pursuing. As the Bill stands, the electorate hire the mayor, but they cannot fire him until the end of the four-year term. If hiring and firing is a reasonable description of accountability, the current method is both flawed and dangerous. If I were to be a successful candidate for the post of mayor of London, and I had no intention of seeking a second term of office, I could run amok. I could go out of control for four years because I would fear nothing. A one-term mayor would not be accountable to the electorate.

Under the Bill, the electorate cannot fire the mayor, except at the end of four years. It follows that somebody, or something, must have the power to fire the mayor if the post is to be truly accountable. If the electorate do not do the firing, the Assembly is the only realistic alternative. I consider it logistically impractical to use any of the methods that have been suggested to enable the electorate to get rid of the mayor. Even if we did, the arguments of perverseness would apply just as much to the electorate as the Assembly.

It would also be wrong in principle to allow the electorate to fire the mayor. If we think through the concept of hiring and firing, it will become obvious why we should focus on the Assembly. Hiring and firing is too slick and simplistic a phrase to describe any part of the political process. Accountability involves more than hiring people and firing them if they are unsuitable. It involves giving the hired person work to do and checking to ensure that it has been done; and if the work is not satisfactory, the person can then be fired.

Apparently, criticism sometimes works. We have heard this afternoon that sometimes if people are criticised enough, they will get the message and go away; but sometimes pigs will fly before that happens, so criticism is not a practical sanction. Neither is censure. It is all very well to allow people to pass a vote of no confidence, and then, lo and behold, through some mystical process, the mayor goes away. He might, but there is no guarantee.

There seems only one practical sanction to deal with all the problems that have been mentioned this afternoon—that is, to remove the mayor from office. That brings me back to the point that somebody must have the power to fire a mayor who has transgressed. The Bill makes no provision for that; it provides only that a court can remove the mayor in specific circumstances, or the electorate after four years. That is the Government's argument.

In fairness to the Minister, I have some sympathy with his point about the petty and perverse use of such a power. I also have some sympathy with the argument that it is possible to overrule a mandate if the Assembly goes too far. Those are valid points, but neither is an argument for having no sanction; they are arguments for accepting a different amendment that guards against what the Minister is concerned about.

The Minister also said that he was worried that if we granted this power, it would make the mayor subordinate to the Assembly, whereas the Government want the mayor to be subordinate to no one but the electorate—but only after four years. But if there is no accountability on a day-to-day basis, the mayor is out of control.

4.30 pm

I am not wedded to the Lords amendment but I hope that the House, like me, is prepared to consider an alternative such as a bigger majority or defining the circumstances so that the power is limited. The Minister used the example of perverseness. In the case of President Clinton, the perverse activity seemed to be misuse of a cigar. It should not be beyond the wit of even this Government to frame an amendment to the Lords amendment to rule out the improper use of cigars as a ground for impeachment. However, that would not breach the principle that there have to be some such grounds.

The Government's logic is deeply flawed. If they want to use perverseness as the reason for opposing the amendment, where does that argument end? If the electorate to whom the Minister wants us to turn were so

[Mr. Wilshire]

perverse as to vote for someone of whom the Government did not approve, would they use the same argument and say, "This is perverse, so we should not have elections because the power that we have given the electorate is not being used in the way we want"?

My neighbour, the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell), argued that it would be sensible to leave it for now, see how we get on, and review the situation once we have a mayor. I would rather suffer from the perverse use of the power in the amendment than have a mayor who ran amok without any control.

Mr. Wilkinson: What is noteworthy about this debate is that so few London Labour Members have seen fit to participate in it. It is true that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has given his aide-de-camp, the Minister for Housing and Planning, leave from his day job to come to the House and that we had a spirited intervention from the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes). I see a great future for him as a Labour Whip, rather like the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty). The hon. Member for Upminster (Mr. Darvill) made a conscientious contribution, as we would expect from an assiduous member of the Standing Committee.

The fact is that the Labour party in London, in its heart of hearts, realises that this stinks. The Government are prepared to have a mayor in office with no proper check, balance or effective sanction on the exercise of his power. That is typical of the Labour party today. It is an utterly undemocratic party and wishes to institutionalise autocracy in the capital. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) put it well. It is a shameful process because Labour could foist an unpopular candidate on the people of London who may then find himself in office.

The characteristics needed to win high-profile election campaigns such as that for the mayoralty are not necessarily those needed for good, effective, conscientious, trustworthy government. A high-profile personality may be great for winning elections but it remains to be seen whether such personalities can avoid letting the excitements of office go to their heads. The opportunities for abuse of the mayoralty's powers are manifold. As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) said, they are perhaps greater than those for any public servant in our constitutional history apart from the Prime Minister. I was struck by what was said by two highly independent and senior Conservative Members, my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) and for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). Not having had to sit through the Committee, they come late to this debate, but, from their objective perspective, they understand the real danger that the mayor may abuse his power.

The British political system is noteworthy for its powers of patronage. They typify the goings-on in this place, which are being institutionalised in the reform of the other place that will be completed by the end of next week. Such cronyism seems all set to be institutionalised in London, too. The people of London need to check it, and ensure that there is no abuse. The men and women whom they elect to the Assembly will be seen by the electors as the custodians and guardians of their interests. Fourteen will have constituencies and will represent local interests. The other 11 will purport to represent the interests of London as a whole, although we know that, because of the closed lists by which they are chosen, they will represent more the interests of political parties.

The Londoners who elect the Assembly men and women do not wish them to be paper tigers. They would not imagine that the men and women whom they put into the Assembly would have the power only to question the mayor once a month and comment on mayoral strategies for transport or spatial development. They do not expect the biannual people's question time to be much more than a political circus and media event. The serious examination of the performance and character of the mayor in office is surely the proper role for an elected democratic Assembly for London. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras laughs, but these are serious issues and are so regarded by the people of London.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Assembly doing its job properly by questioning and holding to account the mayor, day in and day out, is how the checks and balances in the system will work?

Mr. Wilkinson: No, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne made so eminently clear, unless there is an ultimate power to fire him, a high-profile, aggressive self-confident mayor may think that it is all made for him, especially if he may not wish to stand again at the end of his four years. He may have become cosy with the construction companies and too familiar with other business interests so that he does not care a jot or tittle for criticism. He will press on regardless, conscious that he will earn a good pension and hopeful of being put on the board of big companies. He will feather his nest. Any publicity is food and drink to the media-hungry big personalities who may vie for the office.

I listened with great attention to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), who brings much legal and local government expertise to this debate. However, I return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne: unless the Assembly can fire the mayor, it will prove to be a paper tiger. That would not only demean the Assembly but diminish the credibility of the authority as a whole. It is a binary system, and unless both parts work effectively, it will not carry authority.

I forgot to mention the contribution of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell). I should have because it was exceptionally thoughtful. He brings more local government experience—or would new Labour call it baggage—to our debates than most Labour Members. The hon. Gentleman uttered many serious words of caution. He showed plainly that he was not satisfied that there should be no power to remove the mayor. He did not believe that it was feasible politically to implement the amendment. Of course, arithmetically it is not, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough pointed out. From the point of view of the hon. Gentleman's career, it is not worth sticking his neck out and voting against the Government. The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) made it plain in his earliest intervention in proceedings on the Bill, I think on Second Reading, that, if he voted against the Government, he would be deselected, and that he therefore would not do so.

We must understand that autocracy is being imposed in London and that the Labour party has scant regard for democracy in London and the rest of the country. If the binary system is to work effectively, the mayor will have to co-operate, and work hand in glove, with the Assembly. They should be as one. The mayor should welcome consultation. He should be given an incentive to consult, in the knowledge that, if he upsets the Assembly, which is made up of elected representatives like him, his future could be on the line. That is the kind of democracy that the people of London expect and to which any objective observer would believe that the people of London or any great capital city are entitled. The tragedy is that the Labour party will not provide it.

Mr. Waterson: This has been a fascinating debate. It was especially fascinating to see the Minister for Housing and Planning drop in and explain to us that he was not really here; that he is a sort of virtual Minister for these purposes.

I express my pleasure at seeing the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) here. He is obviously expecting a rough campaign because I see that he has recruited a stunt double. I do not know whether wearing a beard is a requirement of his campaign, but it seems to be quite common among members of the team. It is good of the right hon. Gentleman and some of his team to fill up the Chamber, no doubt taking time off from the arduous sending of identical letters to people about the campaign.

The debate has done credit to the House. It has been extremely wide ranging. I do not have time to go through in detail the points that have been made. The speech of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was useful in highlighting what I have called the Mayor Barry parallel. If there is no power to deal with a mayor who kicks over the traces and loses the plot, how on earth is any control to be exercised except, as he pointed out, perhaps by the media? The errant mayor would simply be hounded from office by the press.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) expressed sensible reservations about the legislation, but I parted company with him on his suggestion that the issue could be dealt with later on. It would be a nightmare to have to deal with the problem when it had arisen and we had a mayor who was out of control or facing criminal or other investigations.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) seems obsessed with the notion of coups on the GLC. He reminded me of the quote:

> "Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason?
>
> For if it prosper, none dare call it treason."

It is a coup if one is losing and not a coup if one is winning. I noted that he stumbled across the central issue. If one does not have the ability to stage a coup, as happened to the former leader of the GLC, how is one to make a mayor who is behaving badly stand down?

4.45 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Bill, at least in the shape in which it left the House some months ago, had some penetrating things to say about it. The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) made some interesting comments on the proposals. My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) spoke of the good sense of Londoners, and that will be brought into play if the amendment is not accepted by the Government. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) had a lot to say on votes of confidence and so on. From what I can gather, with the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) claiming to lead his party outside Parliament, perhaps his own leader will face a vote of confidence fairly soon.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Mr. Darvill) talked about protecting Londoners, but surely the Government's attitude to the Bill would principally protect a mayor, and a bad mayor at that. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) rightly referred to international comparisons. My hon. Friends the Members for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) respectively, talked about the need for accountability and the autocracy of the Government, as displayed by the Bill.

On any view, we need a mechanism for removing a mayor on the grounds of dishonesty, any other serious misbehaviour, if he has forfeited the support of the Assembly, or if he has just lost the plot generally. There have to be mechanisms for removing him or her. In other places such as Los Angeles, mechanisms exist to remove the Mayor by petition or otherwise.

Much time was spent on the attempts to impeach the President of the United States for high crimes and misdemeanours, but saying that the US system is hopelessly flawed is not a good argument against introducing an equivalent system here, but one that works. With due respect to the Minister, the principal charge against the President was perjury. Surely even the Minister would not suggest that a mayor guilty of perjury should continue in office.

The amendments have moved away from the so-called nuclear option described in the other place, but there is no provision for votes of confidence. If a Prime Minister loses a vote of confidence, he resigns, but constitutionally he does that because there is a higher authority—the Queen. There is no higher authority in London under the legislation than the mayor. The mayor would join the select band, which includes His Holiness the Pope and the Grand Mufti, of people who simply cannot be sacked by anyone, at least on this earth. If the mayor lost touch with reality and barricaded himself in his bunker, convinced that he was right and everyone else was wrong, there would be nothing that could be done about it.

We think that the proposal strikes the right balance; 80 per cent. seems to be a reasonable proportion. If the Government felt that they could accept the principle—even though they have not yet done so—but achieve it differently, we should welcome their proposals.

The Government's basic position is that the matter should be left to the ballot box in due course and, if appropriate, to the law in the meantime. However, we all know that the law can take a long time; in America, arguments are deployed that a sitting president should not even have to face legal action until he has left office. Similar arguments could be deployed in this country.

The Government's only other argument against the proposal is that other parties would somehow gang up on the hapless mayor, who enjoyed the wholehearted support of ordinary folk in London, and get rid of him as soon as he was elected. However, the hon. Member for Ilford,

[Mr. Waterson]

South—my former pair—pointed out that that could have happened under the old GLC; indeed, it did happen. It seems crazy and enormously risky for the Government to have no provision whatever to remove a mayor from office, except in severe circumstances.

If a legal case were brought against the mayor, it could well take the rest of his or her period of office for such a case to be resolved. That would be to take an enormous risk with the constitutional arrangements. It would be an enormous risk for the people of London and, for that reason, I urge the House to accept the amendments.

Mr. Raynsford: With the leave of the House, I shall make a few comments in response to a rather uneven debate. We have heard some thoughtful and interesting contributions from both sides of the House. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward), who speaks for the Opposition, chose, in his introductory remarks, to take an ill-judged, party political approach—including some extremely distasteful personal attacks on individuals. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), who must have been somewhat astonished to find himself included in the catalogue of supposed Labour extravagance and waste, made an astonishingly elegant riposte.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the Minister for that last comment. However, does he agree that the animadversions about candidates in the mayoral election fell first from his lips, not from those of my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward)?

Mr. Raynsford: When I introduced the debate, I focused on the key issue—whether there should be a means for the Assembly to remove a mayor from office. I gave examples of when I thought that it would be inappropriate for that power to be available. I did not set out to impugn individuals in any way—except in one aside about one candidate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] It was an aside, referring to one gentleman whose past might well lead some people to conclude that the Conservatives have a strong reason for wanting a power of removal, to avoid embarrassment.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way to me again. Could he devise some system by which—while delivering speeches during the debates on the Bill—he could indicate whether an observation is substantive or an aside?

Mr. Raynsford: With his considerable experience of this place, the right hon. Gentleman knows the difference between an aside, delivered with a degree of humour, and an ill-judged, party political rant.

It is clear that there is no single model to which all Members of the House—or indeed all members of one political party—can sign up. Several different options have been considered and explored by various people, who have all concluded that no single model can be satisfactory. Whether we are talking about a framework for impeachment, or for a vote of no confidence, or to recall petitions, they are all subject to weaknesses. Those weaknesses were identified. The risk of abuse and of the demeaning of those powers—in the way that the American constitution was demeaned by the activities of those wanting the impeachment of President Clinton—provides a salutary reason why we should not lightly take that route.

The key question must be whether sufficient and satisfactory safeguards are in place. Are there sufficient and satisfactory phone cards—safeguards—

Mr. Woodward: Phone cards? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Member for Witney, who revealed his ignorance by referring to "our city" earlier in the debate—presumably implying that he lives here and identifies more with London than with his own constituency—really should know better than to make such facile and juvenile contributions.

The key question is whether there are adequate safeguards to ensure that any mayor who acts improperly or incorrectly can be held to account. The answer is that, in our legislation, there are. Let me summarise them.

First, the mayor is subject to a rigorous system of accountability. He will have to account, on a monthly basis, to the Assembly; twice a year he will be subject to open questioning at people's question time; he will have an annual state of London debate—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) seems to regard a people's question time as beneath his dignity. I am sure that he would not expose himself to the electorate—*[Interruption.]* He would not expose himself to the scrutiny of the electorate—far from it. That is not his style. He would much prefer to hand down his views from on high and not be accountable at all.

Our framework allows for proper accountability. In addition to the explicit arrangements for accountability, as everyone knows, the mayor will be subject to regular scrutiny by the media and the public of London. There is also a budgetary provision under which the Assembly will have the power to veto the mayor's budget if it regards it as unsatisfactory. That provision is a safeguard against inappropriate spending, waste and abuse—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members clearly do not wish to listen to the debate and are behaving in a childish manner—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call on the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) to be quiet.

Mr. Raynsford: I was referring to the budgetary safeguards, which ensure that the mayor will be subject to proper scrutiny by the Assembly. The mayor's budget can be changed and overruled by the Assembly if the Assembly believes that the mayor is misusing his power.

Next, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) pointed out, there are the statutory officers, whose role in this Authority is the same as in any local authority. Finally, there is explicit provision in the legislation for the mayor to be removed from office if he is convicted of an offence, is bankrupt or is disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1989 or by the Audit Commission.

The hon. Members for Witney and for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) suggested that there could be circumstances in which the mayor was suspected of wrongdoing, but that wrongdoing could not be proved

in a court. In such circumstances, they believe that it would be appropriate for the Assembly rather than the courts to remove the mayor.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I did not say that.

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry, but if the hon. Gentleman looks at the record tomorrow, he will see that was the thrust of his remarks.

It is a dangerous constitutional principle that someone could be removed from office on the basis of suspicion about his or her actions, when those actions would not lead to a conviction in court. That is a dangerous route to go down.

Mr. Hughes: I have one simple question: why is it that everyone else in office—the First Minister in Scotland, the Prime Minister in England, Commissioners in Europe and mayors in local government—have constraints, restrictions, qualifications, and other people controlling what they do, yet, uniquely in any UK administration, the mayor of London cannot be removed by the Assembly of which he is part?

Mr. Raynsford: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be aware from our earlier debate that the clear distinction, in the case of the GLA, is that the mayor is separately elected by the people of London on a different mandate, and it is inappropriate for someone elected by the people of London to be removed by another group of people who do not have the same mandate. That is the principle. He and his colleagues asked about overseas experience. We looked carefully at that. We looked at the arrangements in Washington, where there is provision for Congress to appoint an official to take over responsibility for functions in that city as a result of the failure of its mayor. I doubt whether the Liberal Democrats would have been pleased if we had provided for the Secretary of State to have powers to intervene.

Washington, however, is just one model. In preparing the Bill, we discussed the matter with people in many parts of the world and their advice on this matter was, overwhelmingly, be very careful. Provisions for impeachment or recall may sound attractive, but they can be abused. The ability to abuse the system and, on the whim of a political grouping, remove a mayor who has been democratically elected by the people of London is a danger that we do not believe it is right to allow in the legislation.

The Liberal Democrats urged us to have faith in democracy. We have faith in democracy, and in the people of London. We are giving them back the right to elect their own mayor and Assembly. Only the people of London should be able to remove the mayor. That is a proper framework of accountability in a democratic structure. The people of London will elect the mayor, and only the people of London should be able to remove that mayor.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 151.

Division No. 293] **[5 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam

Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*

Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Clause 3

TIME OF ORDINARY ELECTIONS

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 3, line 20, at end insert—

("(d) for or in connection with enabling electors to vote in the poll at such polling stations or other places as may be prescribed, at such times as may be prescribed, on such one or more days preceding the date specified in or provided under subsection (1) above for the poll as may be specified in the order.

( ) The provision that may be made by an order under paragraph (d) of subsection (4) above includes provision for such enactments or statutory instruments as may be specified in the order to have effect with such modifications as may be so specified.

( ) In this section "prescribed" means specified in, or determined in accordance with, an order under this section.")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 5, 7 to 11 and 586 to 611.

Mr. Raynsford: This group of amendments deals with a range of matters relating to the election of the mayor and Assembly. It provides for a system of early voting, amends the Representation of the People Act 1983 to take account of the new electoral arrangements— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

5.15 pm

Mr. Raynsford: This group of amendments will amend the Representation of the People Act 1983 to take account of the new electoral arrangements that the Bill introduces; provide for the filling of a vacancy in the office of mayor in particular circumstances; and give the Secretary of State powers, by order, to set limits on campaign expenditure and to incur expenditure on the Greater London Authority's first election in advance of the appointment of the Greater London returning officer. The group also includes a number of drafting or technical amendments.

I commend the amendments to the House. If any hon. Member wishes to raise a point of detail, I shall be happy further to explain the amendments.

Mr. Woodward: We have various concerns about this group of amendments, particularly its late introduction and precipitate consideration in another place. However, because of the short time that the Government have afforded for debate on the Bill, I shall address my remarks specifically to Lords amendment No. 2, on early voting, which seeks to introduce a completely novel system at the first election to a completely novel authority. We oppose the amendment.

We support sensible measures to increase the often dismal turnout at local elections—turnout at Britain's local elections is often the lowest of all European Union member states. We also do not in principle oppose the concept of early voting. In June 1998, in evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, the Conservative party largely supported the principle. However, we believe that introducing early voting at the first London election would be one experiment too far.

It has already been decided that an untried, untested system of electronic counting will be used at the election. It is debatable whether computer scans, rather than hand-counted votes, will increase transparency of the process. Voters already feel perplexed by the election, thanks to the convoluted electoral system giving each Londoner four votes. Few members of the public—indeed, few hon. Members—could properly explain the system to be used for electing Assembly members, and I suspect that only a few more hon. Members could wax more lyrical about the supplementary vote to be used to elect the mayor.

It would be ironic if the early voting experiment, which is designed to increase turnout, has the opposite effect of decreasing turnout, making voters feel even more distant from the process. A simpler process would have keener followers.

Contrary to an argument advanced by the Government, the experiment will be of no use to those analysing the impact of early voting on turnout. There has never been a Greater London Authority election. The place to run a trial of early voting is surely in local government elections, in which a change in turnout could be compared with results over many years.

As I said, the experiment could diminish turnout below the levels of interest that this high-profile, personality-driven campaign might otherwise attract—however, with no baseline comparison to make, we shall never know. If early voting is to be explored as an option, we should favour pilot projects. The first election for a mayor and Assembly for London should not be a pilot project for anything other than itself.

Clause 3 is badly drafted and vague. I wrote to the Minister for some clarification on the clause, as I thought that it might be helpful to have such clarification before this debate. On Tuesday, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), replied:

"The Government Office for London wrote to the London Boroughs and the Common Council in August seeking initial comments on outline proposals . . . I have placed a copy of the letter in the House Library. We are considering the responses received".—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1999; Vol. 337, c. *81*.]

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[Mr. Woodward]

The House is therefore being asked today to pass legislation before the Government have even finished considering responses to the outline proposals.

The clause, without going into any further detail, would give the Secretary of State wide-ranging powers—we have become rather used to those with this rather autocratic Government—to allow voting at places other than polling stations. The Secretary of State would have the power to set polling hours and to permit early voting on any number of days prior to polling day. That runs counter to the recommendation of the Home Affairs Committee that that should apply only from the Monday of polling week onwards. The Secretary of State has the power to make changes to enactments. The amendment mentions little about safeguards, and I look forward to the Minister telling us about those this afternoon.

There is nothing to ban exit polling of early voting. Is it the intention of the Minister so to do? It is clear that the early release of exit polling data can and does materially affect election results. We do not know who will pay the extra bills for early voting. I imagine that the Minister for Housing and Planning—taking part not in his advisory role, but once again at the Dispatch Box—will inform us. Who will pay for the guarding of ballot boxes outside polling hours? What will be the implications for the police?

One of the biggest concerns in the boroughs is the risk of personation—multiple voting by the same individual, whose multiple appearance over several days is not recognised by officials at the polling station. What specific steps is the Minister taking to prevent that? Or is this yet another area for consideration which the Government have not yet considered? We are being asked to pass a measure which—like much of the Bill—the Government have not thought through.

Mr. Bercow: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is particularly incumbent upon the Government in this case immediately to provide practical reassurance that their procedures do not provide scope for personation, in view of the fact that, in another area of Government legislation, the Government are undoubtedly guilty of providing exactly such scope for personation—namely in relation to petitions for grammar schools?

Mr. Woodward: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I hope the Minister will take those matters seriously. The Government have a lot of experience of canvassing individuals for their votes. Perhaps more consideration has been given to running the campaigns of individual members of the Labour party than to the proper business of the Minister—the consideration of his responsibilities for organising early voting and telling the House today what the implications and safeguards will be.

The Government office for London wrote to electoral registration officers on 10 August this year, outlining the proposal to allow early voting from 9 am on Thursday 27 April to 5 pm on Sunday 30 April. Polling hours would be 9 am and 9 pm on Thursday to Friday, and 9 am and 5 pm on Saturday and Sunday. With the polls open on Sunday, there would be three clear days before polling day proper. Why is the experiment not conforming to the advice of the Home Affairs Committee, which proposed having one early polling station per borough, located centrally? This is an experiment too far.

This is already a highly complex new situation in London. Why have the Government not looked at ways of making proxy and, in particular, postal votes more easily obtainable for Londoners—as that very probably would be a far better solution for London next year? We should retain an open mind on closely monitored trials for early voting where the impact on turnout patterns can be measured, but not in this election. This amendment carries high risks and high costs, and the House should not agree to it.

Mr. Forth: I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward). What disturbs me more than anything is that this radical measure is being slipped in at this stage, when the House cannot do justice to it. Any change to our electoral and voting procedures is of great importance and should be made only after great thought and with caution. To suggest such a general and loose wording is completely unacceptable, and I hope that the House will oppose the amendment for that reason.

In any case, I am not convinced that we need to make voting easier for the electorate. I do not take a patronising attitude to voters which assumes that they are incapable of getting to voting station in the generous hours that are currently allowed to them. I do not start from the same assumption as many: that our voters are stupid or incapable of getting to a polling station.

Even if I made such an assumption, and thus patronised the electorate, the provisions of the Lords amendments would not be the right way to deal with the problem. I would want more reassurance than the amendments could possibly provide about the security of such an approach to voting. As soon as we start to spread voting procedures physically and chronologically, we are in danger of losing the control that has been such an integral and important part of the voting process since it began in this country.

The risks outweigh any potential or claimed benefits of the dubious proposal to extend the voting process by the means that the Lords amendments describe so vaguely and inadequately. We have no idea what

"polling stations or other places as may be prescribed, on such one or more days preceding the date specified"

means. The process threatens to become dangerously out of control and could jeopardise the foundations of our electoral system, which we have rightly taken for granted because of the excellence of the provisions to which we are accustomed, and of the work of electoral registration officers and others. The Lords amendments, which the Government support, are unacceptable. The House should throw out Lords amendment No. 2, and insist on proper consideration before it is brought back.

Mr. Brooke: Arrangements in my constituency have always been in advance of those in the rest of the country. When the Great Reform Act 1832 was passed, the franchise in Westminster declined because its parameters were more liberal than the Act's provisions.

In 1784, at the end of the first week's polling in a six-week campaign, my predecessor, Mr. Charles James Fox, was 300 votes behind in an electorate of about 6,000. The Duchess of Devonshire was brought in, and in the next five weeks kissed every tapman and navigator between Hounslow and Temple Bar, and Mr. Fox was returned. The state of the poll was made known regularly

during the six weeks. In 1846, although polling occurred at least on one day, the result of the poll was declared at every hour, so that both parties knew what was happening.

I assume from Lords amendment No. 2 that what I have described constitute the evils of conservatism, and that what we are promised in the next century are the benign benefits of radical modernisation. However, I must disagree.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) is as informative as ever, but he failed to make it clear that Charles James Fox was not his immediate predecessor, for which we—and probably he—are grateful.

We welcome Lords amendment No. 2 and the thrust of the group of amendments. I want merely to reflect an aggravation for voters. People often realise too late that an election will be held and that they will not be in their constituencies. I hope that the Lords amendments will provide for orders to be made to allow people who know that they will be away, and have only just discovered that a poll is to be held, to register and cast their vote by post or proxy up to the last minute. Inability to do that is a perpetual frustration.

People regularly claim that they would have voted if they had known about the election in time. If we can do something about that, we will improve the reliability of an election's outcome, its reflection of the community's views and the credibility of the exercise by maximising the number of people who vote.

Mr. Wilshire: The Minister said that the proposal was for early voting. That put me in mind of, "Vote early, vote often." That is at the heart of why I am opposed to it. It is foolish in the extreme and simply asking for trouble to try to do yet more things on an occasion when we are voting for a mayor and an Assembly of a type that we have never had before, with two ballots on the same day using two different systems. That is to play fast and loose with the electoral process. When politicians start tinkering with the electoral process alarm bells should start ringing all over the place.

5.30 pm

Having been a councillor, I understand why people would like more than 30 per cent. to vote in council elections, but I have observed that in a general election, using exactly the same system, for some mysterious reason 70 per cent. are able to cope. I simply do not buy the idea that when there is a local election it becomes impossible for those same people to vote again. The simple explanation for only 30 per cent. bothering to vote is that only 30 per cent. could care less. The moral is not to play fast and loose with the electoral system but somehow to make local government more relevant and important to electors. If the Assembly and the mayor are to be so important, so popular and so good, 70 per cent. will surely turn up, so why worry? If we use the same system and only 30 per cent. turn up, the message to the Government will be clear.

I am seriously worried about tinkering in this way. If we are to go down this route, because the majority says that we should, we should settle for the principle that every elector can vote at only one place rather than having electors running all over the place whenever and wherever they like. How else will the candidates have any chance of checking on personation? Voting early and often becomes much more likely if there are lots of different polling places.

We should limit the number of voters who can vote at any one place. How on earth can a returning officer and a presiding officer cope with anyone on the entire register being able to turn up, without either chaos ensuing, producing a flawed result, or queues forming that are so long as to put people off voting?

Mr. Wilkinson: The amendment might be thought frivolous but it is deadly serious, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) made plain. Any monkeying about with the electoral system should be undertaken only after the most careful scrutiny and with plenty of notice. The amendment has simply been popped into the Bill at the Government's behest to suit their convenience, because they realise that the Assembly and the mayoralty are not likely to arouse much public interest and they have to find a way of getting more people to vote.

The concept of a multiplicity of polling places belittles the seriousness and importance of a voting day as an occasion. Voting is one of the most important functions that a citizen can fulfil. We should not trivialise it. The Labour party talks about voting in supermarkets and other public places—no doubt hairdressers will be next—but that will make it like filling in a national lottery form rather than exercising a democratic franchise on which the good governance of the country depends.

There is a very real danger of personation if the polling process takes place over several days. I am sure that it will be argued that if the turnout persists in being low, even with early polling, we ought to have late polling. That happened when I was an observer at an election in Peru. I do not think that it affected the result but it is not good electoral practice to have late polling or polling over several days—we heard earlier about exit polls influencing a result—as political and economic circumstances can change and make a material difference to the outcome. That is why traditional voting hours make good sense.

One of my memories of the February 1974 general election may make people realise how important the problem of impersonation is. Had I won at that election, I would not tell this story, but one of my Pakistani supporters came up to me in the university ward in Bradford, West and said, "Mr. John, Mr. John, I have done very well. Not only have I voted for you, but I have voted on behalf of my brother, who is in Pakistan, and my uncle, who died last year." I can tell that story because I did not get in, and it reveals the seriousness of the problem of personation.

Mr. Randall: I echo what has been said by my hon. Friends. I am appalled that such an innovation should be brought into the Bill at such a late stage. We had many happy hours on the Standing Committee, and, if the Government had wanted to introduce such a system, I cannot understand why they did not do so then. There are important questions that should have been be debated, but knowing the Liberal Democrats' propensity to debate such matters for ever, I have a slight feeling of dread that if that had happened, we might still be in the Standing Committee

[Mr. Randall]

now. I am surprised that the Liberal Democrats have accepted the amendment so easily; its wording is so wishy-washy, and would allow so many different things to happen, that it should be rejected straight away.

All sorts of questions have been raised, and I agree with what has been said about exit polls. There is always a bandwagon effect, and we should be careful to ensure that exit polls are not made public, or perhaps do not take place at all.

As a former campaigning agent, I have some advice for the Minister. In my experience, it is difficult enough to cope with one election day, so if he had to deal with an election taking place over several days he might lose even more of his hair. Will schools that are used as polling stations be shut for considerable periods? Will supermarkets be used, or even furniture stores? There are some very important matters to discuss.

I cannot understand why the people of London are to be treated as guinea pigs. The main meat of the Bill—the Assembly and the mayor—already makes them guinea pigs, and the people in my constituency are not particularly happy about that. They will be even less happy about having the new arrangement thrust in at the last moment as well.

Why is that happening? Is it a desperate attempt to get more core Labour voters to turn out? I suggest that the reason why they do not come out now is not because they have not got time, but because they do not want to. Keeping the polling stations open for longer, and on other days, will make no difference.

I have great respect for the Minister after all those hours on the Standing Committee. I know that he is an honourable man and he did an excellent job. I therefore ask him whether he will kindly withdraw the amendment—although I do not know whether he can do that, as it is a Lords amendment. I promise that if the Government agree to withdraw it—or not to agree with it, or whatever—I shall say no more about it, but will put it down to campaigning exuberance and the Minister's desire to please his master.

Mr. Raynsford: We have had an interesting debate, which seemed to reveal a degree of panic in the Conservative party at the idea of anything designed to make it easier for people to vote. The suggestion that early voting will discourage turnout is nonsense, and the idea that civilisation will end if we break the habit of allowing people to vote in local elections only on the first Thursday in May was well demolished by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), with his delightful descriptions of voting patterns in the 18th and 19th centuries.

All that this modest proposal will do is to give powers to the Secretary of State to introduce an arrangement for voting in advance. As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) rightly pointed out, the amendment is simply a response to the problem of people finding, relatively late in the campaign, that they will be away but have not registered in time for a postal or proxy vote. To cover that eventuality, this modest proposal is designed to make it easier for some people to retain their democratic rights. I find it astonishing that the proposal should have been treated as it has been by the Conservatives.

In response to the question put by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, I can confirm that we are consulting with local authorities on the best way to achieve advance voting. They have practical considerations to take into account, but we wish to engineer it so that—

Mr. Woodward: Yes, engineer it.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman thinks that it is funny that we are talking seriously with local government about how to introduce arrangements that will work and enable people to vote who otherwise could not. He may regard the failure of democracy, when people cannot vote, as gerrymandering; we do not. It is in everyone's interests that people should be able to vote if they are entitled to do so. I am appalled by the hon. Gentleman's casual attitude and the smirk on his face when I am talking about serious matters.

Mr. Woodward: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman had a smirk on his face while we were making serious proposals to make it possible for people to vote who would otherwise find that their democratic rights are denied. The Labour party believes in democracy, but the Conservative party has once again shown its contempt for democracy and why it is the party of conservatism.

Mr. Woodward: If the Minister so strongly believes in one member, one vote, why will he not allow it to be used for the selection of the Labour party candidate for mayor?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not the subject of this debate. I will take no lessons from him on democracy. We are talking about making it easier for people to vote in the GLA elections in May next year and I shall not be diverted by him into another channel. He should know that. If he spent more time doing his own job properly, instead of making cheap gibes at other people—including a distasteful personal attack in which the Deputy Speaker had to intervene in an earlier debate—the hon. Gentleman would do the House a service. Perhaps he might show a little more judgment in future.

This modest measure is designed to ensure that we help people to vote who otherwise would be unable to do so. That may increase the turnout or it may not. I cannot guarantee that it will achieve the objective of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey and improve the reliability of the outcome. That is hoping for too much from measures that are modest but appropriate. I hope that the House will endorse them.

Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 322, Noes 119.

Division No. 294] **[5.43 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*	Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ainger, Nick	Austin, John
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Barnes, Harry
Alexander, Douglas	Barron, Kevin
Allan, Richard	Battle, John
Allen, Graham	Bayley, Hugh

Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oliner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael

Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Tony McNulty.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 5 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 6 disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 7 to 11 agreed to [one with Special Entry].

New Clause

SALARIES AND EXPENSES

Lords amendment: No. 12, after clause 22, to insert the following new clause—*Salaries and expenses*—

" .—(1) The Authority shall pay to the Mayor and the Assembly members salaries at such levels—

(a) as the Authority from time to time determines; or

(b) before the first determination, as the Secretary of State directs.

(2) The Authority may pay to the Mayor and the Assembly members, in respect of expenses incurred in the exercise of their functions, allowances at such levels—

(a) as the Authority may from time to time determine; or

(b) before the first determination, as the Secretary of State may direct.

(3) A determination or direction under subsection (1) above may provide—

(a) for a higher level of salary to be payable to the Mayor than to any Assembly member;

(b) for higher levels of salaries to be payable to Assembly members holding the offices specified in subsection (4) below than to other Assembly members; and

(c) for different salaries to be payable to Assembly members holding different such offices.

(4) The offices mentioned in subsection (3)(b) above are—

(a) Deputy Mayor;

(b) Chair of the Assembly.

(5) A determination or direction under subsection (2) above may provide for different allowances for different cases.

(6) A determination under this section may provide for levels of salaries or allowances to change from time to time by reference to a specified formula.

(7) The Authority's functions of making determinations under this section shall be functions of the Authority which are exercisable by the Mayor and the Assembly acting jointly on behalf of the Authority.

(8) The standing orders of the Authority must include provision for the publication of every determination under this section.

(9) The Secretary of State shall publish any direction under this section as soon as is reasonably practicable after it is given."

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 13 to 16, 115, 532, 564, 658, 742 and 788.

Mr. Raynsford: The amendments provide for the Authority to pay the mayor and Assembly members' salaries and expenses, and to abate those salaries where the members hold other paid public offices to which they have been elected or appointed. They provide for the Authority to establish a pension scheme for the mayor and the Assembly, and for the Authority to publish details each year of salaries and expenses that have been paid and of the financial provision made for pensions. They also provide for the exclusion of Assembly members from attendance allowance or other remuneration schemes of

the fire authority and the London development agency. Such provision is already made in relation to the Metropolitan police authority, and Assembly members cannot be appointed to Transport for London. The other minor amendments are consequential on these principal amendments.

Mr. Forth: This is all very well, but it is yet another case of a substantial issue being slipped in quietly at this stage of the Bill's progress, presumably in the hope that not too many people will notice or pay attention to it.

The amendments raise the substantial issue of whether an elected authority should be free to set whatever pay levels for itself that it deems fit. Not even this House has that freedom: we defer to the Review Body on Senior Salaries, which gives the public a degree of confidence that Members of Parliament are not voting themselves excessive salaries—at least, we think it does. But no such reassurance is built into this mechanism. We are saying, in the purest possible form, that we will trust the elected members to pay themselves an appropriate salary, without any longstop or backstop.

Mr. Raynsford: To avoid any confusion or uncertainty, I should like to make it clear to the right hon. Gentleman, as I hope I did in Committee, that the salaries will be based on the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Board.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Minister for that reassurance. I had not spotted any such provision in the Bill. The Minister's confirmation will give some comfort to the public, particularly as this is a completely new venture, and for that I am grateful. If nothing else, the debate has clarified one matter.

I should like a similar reassurance from the Minister who, I am interested to see, is playing a prominent role in our proceedings. He started by saying modestly that he was more of an adviser or bystander, but we have had the privilege and pleasure of his very active participation. We have not heard much from the other Minister, but we may hear more as time goes on. I await the moment.

I have another point on which I hope to elicit a similar reassurance from the Minister. Lords amendment No. 14 concerns pensions, which are, if anything, even more sensitive than salaries. Salaries are relatively open and transparent, but pensions are complex and it is often difficult for the public to understand exactly what is being paid and on what basis. There are questions about length of service and who makes contributions—the employee or the employer—and so on. There are huge variations in pension schemes for elected representatives around the world. Some are extraordinarily generous—in passing, I think that ours is particularly parsimonious and, given that the average length of Members' service is only 12 years, unfair.

6 pm

We need some reassurance from the Minister, similar to that which he gave on salaries, that in making provision for pensions at the start of this new body, there is no question of members being able to vote themselves over-generous pension arrangements that require excessive input from the hapless taxpayer. A balance must be struck, but we need some reassurance that there will be a mechanism to reassure the House and the taxpayer at large that the pensions provisions will have a safety mechanism attached and not be excessively generous.

Mr. Wilshire: The Minister may be able to confirm something for me and thus make most of what I want to say irrelevant. I was not on the Standing Committee, but he told my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) that he had made it clear in Committee that guidelines would have to be followed. Will that be enacted, or is it only what the Government hope will happen? Will the Assembly be able to note the guidance of the top Review Body on Senior Salaries and then move on, or will it be bound by it?

Mr. Raynsford: I can give the hon. Gentleman the reassurance that he seeks. In the ethical guidance that will be issued, we intend to indicate that the initial salaries will be set by the Secretary of State on the recommendations of the Review Body on Senior Salaries. Subsequently, the Authority itself should have regard to the recommendations of the review body in any upgrading of, or changes to, those salaries.

Mr. Wilshire: Sadly, that has not rendered what I want to say useless. Ethical guidelines are wonderful things that we should all follow and recommendations are useful, but I was seeking reassurance that there was a statutory obligation that bound the Authority. Without that, my concerns still stand.

Whatever the ethical considerations, we are being requested to vote to allow the Authority to pay itself whatever it likes. It has only to listen and think before doing so. That is not the case in local government, so why should it be with the Authority? Why are the guidelines, whatever they may be, not being put in terms that require them to be followed? If that is not possible, why cannot we pass the setting of salaries to an independent third party, so we do not have people deciding what they want to put in their pockets and doing so at the public's expense? We should review what we are being asked to do. This is not party political, because my worry applies irrespective of which party the Assembly's members come from.

I am even more concerned about expenses. It is always easy to home in on someone's salary, but expenses often get published only as a general figure. Over the years, many people have wanted to spare their own blushes and avoid the bad publicity of a pay rise by turning their attention to setting their own expenses.

I do not see anywhere in the Bill proposals to limit the power of the Authority's members to set their own expenses. There is not even any reference to guidelines or codes. The Minister may say that there will be guidelines. That would help a bit, but it is not enough reassurance.

The Bill allows for indexation. I am all in favour of indexation as a way of dealing with inflation, but there ought to be some limit on the amount of indexation that can be applied, or some terms that will have to be followed. If I understand it correctly, at the moment the Authority can simply say that it will index salaries by 25 per cent. a year, without justification. That will have the power of law. So I hope that, even at this last moment, the Government will consider limiting automatic indexation of salaries and expenses to the rate of inflation.

[Mr. Wilshire]

If the Authority wishes to go above the rate of inflation, it should have to discuss it at a public meeting at which the press can hear what is said and report it.

The Bill also makes reference to the publication of information. All of us who have been through local government know only too well what happens when a minute advert is put on page 43 of the local rag. That amounts to publication, but it does not tell anyone anything—because no one sees it. In saying that matters must be published, this House, the Government or whoever should specify that information is to be published in such a way that it is clear for all to see, and in a place and form in which the public will understand it.

The other matter on which I ask the Minister to comment is pensions. Rather like expenses, pensions can become a useful way of acting in a fashion that the press and public do not necessarily notice. Will details about pensions include just the employees' portion of the payment? Will they include the employer's portion, or will the two be listed separately? Will details be given of when pensions are payable? There are some splendid examples from around the world. Australia is the one that always come to mind. A person has to serve in the Parliament for only a short period to go on to a full pension. That is a relevant matter for the Greater London Authority.

Will we be told what the end benefits are for people whose contributions are paid at public expense? If a body which is subsidiary to Parliament and the Government is given financial freedom which is not given to other people, we shall lay the system wide open to abuse. In due course, there will be a scandal and we shall be back here having to legislate. We can prevent all that by getting the Bill right tonight.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) has given some wise words of caution. The first days of the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament gave those bodies no good publicity because all they appeared to discuss was salaries, costs and so on. There is a wider issue here about the management of public money paid in salaries, expenses and pensions. I understand the implications: this would take us down the road of public sector pay control for all public bodies.

I have three specific questions for the Minister, but I flag it up that devolving to each body in the public sector the power to make its own pay arrangements provides a large opportunity for actions that produce great criticism. I have checked with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) that my understanding is right. Local government, for example, is now much more free to make its own arrangements. The danger of that whole process is that, if the chief executive of the next door authority is paid £120,000, we have to pay the same to our chief executive, and then the members will decide that they have to pay themselves a decent amount because they will not otherwise receive anything like the same as their chief executive. The sums never go down—the process never works in the other direction.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman thoughtfully referred to public sector pay restraint, but I hope that he can see the difference between a debate about elected members and one about paid officials. That is the only distinction that I should like him to draw.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that, for example, when a person is considering whether to be a full-time councillor, and—in this instance—a full-time council leader, he or she might ask, "How much would that pay me, and how much are the people who work with me paid?"

I have three questions. First, I accept the Minister's proposition that, in effect, we should start with the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body as to what the salaries of the mayor and Assembly members should be. That is the proper way to determine their salaries, and I am not against the idea that the salaries should continue thus to be determined. I do not know whether I have the authority to say that—it is a personal view.

One relevant issue that has been recorded with the review body by London local government leaders, cross-party, is that whatever amount is decided should reflect those aspects that are particular to living, working and serving in the capital city. The amount should reflect, first, the cost of living and travelling in London; and secondly, it should be comparable with that received by people who do comparable jobs. We want the mayor to be worthy of the city, but if he or she chooses not to take their salary, that is their responsibility. However, we should consider how much they are paid compared with mayors of other great European cities—also how large an electorate they represent, what their work load will be, and so on.

That raises some difficult questions, because if one is on the top-up list in London, one is part of a group of people who represent the whole of London, but that should not mean that one can expect a salary that is X times more than someone who represents a particular constituency. Representations have been made to the salaries review body, and I hope that the points that apply specifically to London will be taken properly into account.

My second question does not seem to have been answered thus far. Amendment No. 13 is headed:

"Limit on salaries of members of other public bodies."

It deals with the fact that the dual mandate is not precluded. My understanding is that one could be a Member of Parliament and a member of the Assembly, or a councillor and a member of the Assembly. I accept that, and I support the idea that one should not be able to accumulate salary after salary and expenses after expenses. However, behind that amendment is the question of whether people are expected to be full time or part time. For example, if there is to be a deduction for someone is a Southwark councillor and a member of the Greater London Assembly, why should there not also be a deduction if that person has a private salary?

There is one answer to that question that I can understand, but I do not think that it is sufficient. People who are not doing a full-time job should perhaps expect a reduction if they have other income. That point also applies to the debates about our costs in this place.

Will the Minister consider whether my third question could be dealt with under secondary legislation? Amendment No. 12 includes the provision:

"A determination or direction . . . may provide . . . for different salaries to be payable to Assembly members holding different such officers."

Under a normal understanding of the drafting, that would allow, at least in theory, for a different salary to be paid to everybody in the Assembly, because everyone would be doing a different job—chairing different committees, sub-committees and so on. It cannot be right to give great discretion to the Government of the day to determine the salaries of different people so differentially. I am not suggesting that that is in the Government's mind, but Government must be seen to act impartially. I want to ensure that the wording does not allow abuse of the system, with some people getting a good deal, while others get a less good deal.

Mr. Randall: May I offer the Minister a cautionary tale with regard to people setting their own salaries and allowances? In the London borough of Hillingdon, councillors enjoy the second lowest allowances in London. All the parties have got together to try to increase them and to bring them more in line with those of other boroughs. However, it is a time of financial constraint in the borough and the subject is regarded by the public as very poor for the status of councillors. Week after week, the *Uxbridge Gazette* is full of letters saying that the councillors should show self-restraint.

6.15 pm

I fear that, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, the new Assembly will get off to a bad start if the first weeks are taken up with wrangling over salaries, whether they should be means-tested, and whether there should be a greater deduction for a Southwark councillor because he gets more or less than one from Hillingdon. Thus there is a whole Pandora's box, which will not bode well for the first days of the Assembly.

May I ask the Minister another question, as I may not have been clear enough when I spoke on the previous amendment? Why could this matter not have been addressed in Standing Committee, when we had plenty of time to deal with it? Why has it arisen now, when we are in a bit of a rush?

Mr. Raynsford: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall start by responding to the last question. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) will recall from our debates in Committee that various stages had to be gone through before the Government could incur expenditure on certain items. Before Second Reading, we were not entitled to incur expenditure on those items. We have now progressed beyond that. It was not, however, possible to include in the initial stages of the Bill the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Board, which we could not commission to undertake that work until we had the sanction and cover to do so.

A number of those processes have, of necessity, taken place later than I would, ideally, have liked, but the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that that is simply the mechanics of introducing a new procedure of this nature. We are very much committed to the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Board. We asked it to look into the question of both salaries and pensions, and it will be on its recommendations that the Secretary of State will set the arrangements that will begin the process.

On salaries, the fear is that the first days of the GLA will be overshadowed by decisions being taken by Assembly members on their own salaries. That fear can be allayed by my saying that the Secretary of State will take the decision on the initial occasion. It will therefore be the Government's decision. However, it is not right that an autonomous body—a strategic authority for London—should be entirely precluded from having any responsibility in these matters in future years. The model that we propose is that the SSRB will be required to report periodically on those matters.

Mr. Randall: Will there be any indication of the salary on or around the election date, because we shall all be asked that question on the doorsteps?

Mr. Raynsford: Indeed. We hope that the SSRB will report to the Government next month. The Government certainly want those recommendations, whatever they are—the decision will be taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—to be made public well before the election.

In the first instance, the SSRB will make recommendations. It will be required to report periodically on those matters to the GLA, and the GLA will have to have regard to the SSRB's recommendations before it takes its final decisions. As I said, it would not be right to create a framework in which the GLA has no discretion at all. As a responsible body, it should have the ability to set salaries and pensions for its members. We are dealing now only with the salaries of the mayor and Assembly members, not with those of staff. We believe that the matter should be dealt with within an ethical framework, which requires the GLA to have regard to the SSRB's advice. If it departs without good reason from that advice, it would certainly be open to challenge, and some people would no doubt consider mounting such a challenge. I hope that those safeguards reassure hon. Members who are concerned about this provision.

I shall now deal with the points raised by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). It will be up to the Senior Salaries Review Board to consider what London costs should be taken into account in its recommendations. It will be difficult for the board to find posts comparable to those of mayor and Assembly member, because to the best of my knowledge there are none. The post of mayor is unique, and there are no other assembly members in local government with a strategic role and a salary. It may, therefore, be difficult for that aspiration to be met.

It is proper that people should not be paid from the public purse for performing two functions without an abatement of their salaries. That is the crucial point. Abatement of salaries does not apply to people who have a private income from another source. However, an abatement provision is a proper safeguard for public money.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether the Labour party will require its Assembly members to be full time, or will it allow them to be part time?

Mr. Raynsford: That provision is not precisely defined in the legislation, but the presumption is that the amount

[Mr. Raynsford]

of work will require Assembly members to devote the great bulk of their time to that job. There is no statutory requirement that it must be a full-time occupation with no other activity.

On the hon. Gentleman's third concern, he will understand from what I said in response to the question about the role of the Senior Salaries Review Board that we have had to provide flexibility in the wording to allow different salaries for Assembly members doing different jobs, because we cannot anticipate the board's recommendations. From the evidence given to the board, we have identified different posts and responsibilities that might be considered for a salary uplift because of special responsibilities. The statutory provisions must be flexible to take account of possible recommendations from the board, and we will deal with them when we receive them.

I hope that I have covered all the issues, and that hon. Members will recognise that this is a sensible basis for proceeding. It provides proper safeguards, and will ensure that the Greater London Authority can get off to a good start without allegations of improper preference given to members in their salaries or pension entitlement.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 13 to 16 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

New Clause

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Lords amendment: No. 17, after clause 27, to insert the following new clause—*Equality of opportunity*—

" .—(1) The Authority shall make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that—

(a) in the exercise of the power conferred on the Authority by section 25 above,

(b) in the formulation of the policies and proposals to be included in any of the strategies mentioned in section 33(1) below, and

(c) in the implementation of any of those strategies,

there is due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people.

(2) After each financial year the Authority shall publish a report containing—

(a) a statement of the arrangements made in pursuance of subsection (1) above which had effect during that financial year; and

(b) an assessment of how effective those arrangements were in promoting equality of opportunity.

(3) The functions conferred or imposed on the Authority under or by virtue of this section shall be functions of the Authority which are exercisable by the Mayor acting on behalf of the Authority."

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 18 to 29, 54 to 57, 499 and the Government motion to disagree and Government amendment (a) in lieu thereof, and Lords amendments Nos. 583 and 612 to 633.

Mr. Raynsford: This is a lengthy group of amendments, and I shall try to cover it as quickly as possible, but I hope that the House will bear with me because a number of different issues are involved. They boil down to four key concerns: equality of opportunity; the standing orders of the Authority; delegations to be made by the Authority; and the office of acting mayor. I shall invite the House to disagree with Lords amendment No. 499.

Amendment No. 17 is a Government amendment, but the credit for it must be shared with the Opposition in the other place. In particular, Lord Dholakia, Lord Harris and Lord Archer deserve recognition for their efforts in drawing up proposals that were designed to match the Government's aspiration of ensuring that the GLA is accessible to all Londoners and provides them with equal opportunities.

The new clause will require the mayor to make appropriate arrangements in exercising the Authority's general power and in the preparation of the mayor's strategies, with a view to securing that due regard is had of the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people.

These are not just fine words. The clause also imposes a duty on the mayor to produce, in each financial year, a report setting out the arrangements that have been established, and assessing how effectively they have been in promoting equality of opportunity. That will ensure that the Authority cannot ignore its responsibilities.

I invite the House to disagree with Lords amendment No. 499, which we accepted in another place, and to accept amendment (a), tabled by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. The amendment would make it a duty of not only the Greater London Authority but the Metropolitan police authority and the fire authority to exercise their functions with "due regard" to the need

"to promote equality of opportunity for all persons irrespective of their race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion".

Mr. Burstow: I understand that the phrase "due regard", which the Minister just used, is fairly important in legal terms. Lords amendment No. 499 in its original form made an explicit reference to due regard, to which the courts attach particular importance, but the Government's revised draft—the version that we are considering today—does not include the word "due". Would that weaken or change the legal status of this part of the Bill in any way?

Mr. Raynsford: It will not change the impact of the legislation. It will simply reduce the number of words in the Bill by one, which must be a good thing. If one must have regard to need, one must have regard to need, and one must be reasonable in doing so. Adding the word "due" will not enhance the legislation. That is the advice that we received, and that is why, for drafting reasons, we removed the word.

Authorities must also have regard to the need to eliminate all forms of unlawful discrimination, and to promote good relations between persons of different racial groups, religious beliefs and sexual orientation. I am sure that the House will agree that, in a city that is home to so many different communities, this is the least that Londoners should expect from authorities, and, indeed, from all public bodies that serve them. The amendment restores the provisions of the Race Relations Act 1976, which we believe should remain in the Bill but which was removed in the House of Lords by a Liberal Democrat amendment. It also removes the word "secure" from subsection (1).

I should explain why we are doing that. We do not believe that it will be possible in all circumstances for the Authority to ensure that it secures equality of opportunity for all. If the word "secure" remains in the Bill, the Authority will be vulnerable to frequent legal challenges, and we do not believe that that would be correct or fair. We want the Authority to use its best endeavours to promote equal opportunity, but we do not wish to bring about circumstances in which it might find itself in the courts because, despite its best efforts, it had not been able to achieve that objective.

I hope that I can deal with the other amendments more swiftly. Lords amendment No. 18 provides for the Assembly to make standing orders for the Authority in consultation with the mayor. It limits the extent to which the Assembly can make standing orders in relation to the mayor's functions to those involving a formal interaction between the mayor and the Assembly.

Lords amendments Nos. 19 to 26 constitute our response to concerns expressed in the other place about the need for clarification of the mayor's powers to delegate his or her functions. Lords amendment No. 19 includes the Common Council of the City in the list of authorities to which functions may be delegated. Lords amendment No. 20 makes it explicit that the mayor may delegate functions to another authority only with its written consent. Lords amendment No. 21 permits the mayor to apply conditions to any delegations that he or she makes, and makes it clear that those conditions remain when further delegations take place.

Lords amendment No. 22 allows the detailed powers of delegation provided for in part X—the part that deals with culture—to override those in clause 31. One result of that would be the exclusion of Transport for London as a delegate in respect of the mayor's cultural functions. Lords amendment No. 23 adds the Common Council to the list of authorities that can exercise functions on behalf of the GLA, regardless of whether they would already have the power to do so. Lords amendment No. 24 extends to Transport for London and the LDA the delegation provisions of section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, which permit delegations to committees and sub-committees.

Amendments Nos. 25 and 26 delete current provisions for joint committees, which are replaced by the provisions in amendment No. 27 which are tailored to the GLA's specific needs. Amendments Nos. 28 and 29 provide cross references to part X in clause 32.

The purpose of the final group of amendments is, I hope, self-evident and I shall briefly deal with the principal amendments only. When a vacancy occurs in the office of mayor, the deputy mayor will not, in all circumstances, take on the role of the mayor until that vacancy is filled. The deputy mayor may either be unwilling or unable to take on that duty. In those circumstances, the chair of the Assembly will be invited to take on the duties of the mayor and to act as mayor.

6.30 pm

We believe, therefore, that there should be a formal office of acting mayor to which either the deputy mayor or the chair of the Assembly may be appointed when that is necessary. Amendment No. 613 creates that office. Amendment No. 614 provides the procedures for filling the office of acting mayor. Under these provisions, the deputy mayor becomes acting mayor unless he or she is unwilling to accept office—and notifies the proper officer—or unless he or she fails to make a declaration of acceptance. If the deputy mayor does not become acting mayor, the proper officer notifies the chair of the Assembly of the vacancy and he or she will become acting mayor.

The amendment also provides that, if the deputy mayor or the chair of the Assembly becomes acting mayor, he or she cannot be deputy mayor, chair or deputy chair of the Assembly. The acting mayor will be subject to the provisions of Part II, paragraph 4 of schedule 4, which sets out the functions that are not exercisable by the deputy mayor.

Amendment No. 619 provides that the acting mayor may not act as an Assembly member other than in relation to the Authority's budget. The reason for that is that the acting mayor is not able to introduce a budget in the way that the mayor can. Amendment No. 630 provides for similar procedures where a vacancy occurs in the office of acting mayor. Amendments Nos. 631, 632 and 633 provide for the chair being treated as mayor when the mayor is temporarily unable to act.

The other amendments in the group are consequential upon the principal amendments.

Mr. Burstow: I want to discuss the equality and discrimination provisions in this group of amendments. I shall explore the issues a little further and ask several questions.

During the Bill's consideration in the other place, much attention was paid to equality and discrimination issues. The Minister was right to draw attention to the work of a number of Lords in moving the agenda forward. In the debate on equality on Third Reading in the other place, Lord Whitty spoke for the Government and said:

"The outcome of those discussions has been in my view to alter the approach of the Government to the matter and to improve the provisions."

It is worth recognising that, to some extent and particularly during the Bill's passage through the Lords, the Government listened to noble Lords from all sides. Before the Minister gets too upset, I also recognise that they did that on several occasions when the Bill was in Committee in this House.

Lords amendment No. 499 was tabled by my noble Friend Lord Dholakia, and the Government accepted it, subject to what Lord Whitty described as

"a minor degree of further amendment".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 November 1999; Vol. 606, c. 584-85.]

During the debates in the other place, concern was expressed that the clause, as drafted at that time, would disapply the Race Relations Act 1976 from the Greater London Authority and its functional bodies, the Metropolitan police authority and the fire and emergency planning authority. That was clearly not the intention of noble Lords and they made that clear in the debates. Therefore, any redrafting that avoids that possibility will be entirely welcome.

Lords amendment No. 499 provides a simplified and more precise duty that moves beyond the duty set out in section 71 of the Race Relations Act. The Commission for Racial Equality takes the view that the formulation in the amendment is better than the one in the Act.

[Mr. Burstow]

There are three reasons why the new duty that the Government are accepting, albeit in a modified form, is welcome. First, it is more direct and positive for anti-discrimination and equality of opportunity. Section 71 was drafted in such a way as to be sufficiently vague to allow local authorities and other public bodies to pay lip service to the provision, but not necessarily to follow that through into tangible actions in the way that they delivered services and operated as organisations.

Secondly, the duty of promoting equality of opportunity will be extended to encompass all spheres—not only race equality—identified in the European Union treaty, particularly in article 13.

Thirdly, the duty will relate to all types of unlawful discrimination. Currently, discrimination is unlawful only on grounds of race, sex and disability, but Lords amendment No. 499—and the Government's amendment in lieu—would go on to include issues of religion and sexual orientation. Such a change is entirely to be welcomed in our capital city.

On the face of it, the Government's amendment in lieu will meet the concerns expressed in the other place and achieve the aims that my noble Friends have been trying achieve. However, the Government's amendment has some important omissions—on which I shall ask a few questions—that go to the heart of the provision's subsequent interpretation in judicial review or by the mayor and Assembly.

The first omission—which I mentioned in an intervention on the Minister—is in the phrase "due regard". The phrase appears in the Lords amendment, but has been shortened in the Government's amendment in lieu to "regard", omitting the word "due".

I have spoken to the Commission for Racial Equality about the omission, and, in the short time since the amendment was tabled, it has taken an informal sounding of lawyers who are expert in public law and discrimination law. Those informal discussions have revealed that leading counsel believe that the word "due" has a judicial meaning, and that, therefore, the concept of paying "due regard" could be subject to judicial review. The wording is based on section 120 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, both of which use the phrase "due regard".

The informal—but informed—view of legal experts suggests that the construction placed on the words in the Government's amendment might lead the courts to attach lesser weight to the provision in the Bill than they attach to the equivalent sections of the Welsh and Northern Ireland legislation.

I was therefore grateful for the Minister's comments on the point, but hope that he might say just a bit more—as the tone and tenor of his comments suggested that he thought that it was trite and almost does not matter. However, the point is very important in determining how the courts might in future interpret the provision. If it is true that the loss of one word will make no material difference, I am sure that a statement to that effect by the Minister will satisfy the CRE and be entirely satisfactory for future construction.

The second change, which the Minister mentioned, is the omission of the words "and secure" in subsection (2)(a) of the Government's redraft of Lords amendment No. 499. We have been told today that the duty to secure could become rather onerous, and that failure to perform it could result in the Authority appearing in court. There is some dispute and discussion about how far one will have to go before being deemed to have secured the promotion of equal opportunities.

We think that removing the words weakens the duty that the Lords imposed only a few days ago, and that the Government should make it clear why they have decided that the duty should be watered down. Liberal Democrat Members—and, I believe, the Government—believe that we have to be ambitious in promoting good race relations and equality in London. We also have to ensure that the mayor, Assembly members and the various functional bodies all are clear about the responsibilities that they have to establish a new culture in both the Authority and London and to give a clear lead.

Lords amendment No. 499 is a vast improvement on the Bill. In our earlier consideration of the Bill, in Committee and on the Floor of the House, we—unlike our noble Friends in the other place—were unable to advance the arguments necessary to persuade the Government of the wisdom of making those improvements. It is a great pity that, in this matter, the Government—who often describe themselves as a progressive Government, and dress themselves in the language of progressivism—failed to take the lead from this place, but required the other place to tell them what to do.

I hope that the Minister will be able to give us the legal clarifications that will be necessary for interpretation of the clause.

Mr. Forth: I have always thought that the term "equality of opportunity" was an aspirational will o' the wisp, and nothing that I have heard in this brief debate has made me change my mind. What worries me about the amendment is that it is one thing to be aspirational and to raise expectations—in my view, rather unrealistically; it is quite another to erect a bureaucratic nightmare in trying to give effect to that.

The measure refers, in the modern way, to the formulation of policy proposals, strategies and implementation, and it then gets worse by talking about publishing reports with statements, or arrangements and assessments of how effective they are. One feels that this will be much more of a self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating bureaucracy than anything that is likely to deliver any remote equality of opportunity.

The thought occurs to me that we may have lost sight of any effort to try—as we once said we would—to give an estimate of the cost of all these exercises. This is not cost free—there is a large price tag attached. The mind boggles when one imagines the amount of bureaucracy that would be required to give lip service to the measure.

Maybe "equality of opportunity" in the end will be that we can fill the bureaucracy with people who aspire to some sort of equality of opportunity, and give them their opportunities that way. I do not see the measure working in any other way at all.

Mr. Raynsford: With leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot add much to what I said earlier to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow).

I appreciate his kind words about the improvement to the Bill, and I assure him that we were keen to listen in Committee and in the other place.

We debated the matter and reflected on it, and there was a further debate in the other place. We agreed an amendment which improves the Bill considerably. This is a practical measure to try to promote equality of opportunity, an objective which I hope we all share. It is designed to ensure that the authority acts in that direction effectively and pragmatically.

We have not sought to impose unachievable objectives, which could put the authority in a position where it might fall foul of the law through no fault of its own. It would be impossible to guarantee the achievement of equality of opportunity by the authority in every case if it found itself in the courts through no fault of its own. That is the reason why we have changed the wording to "promote" equality of opportunity.

I cannot add anything to the issue of "due regard", and our lawyers' views differ. I have given an assurance that it does not detract from the meaning of the duty in any way, and I hope that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam will agree.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 18 to 29 agreed to.

Clause 33

GENERAL DUTIES OF THE MAYOR IN RELATION TO HIS STRATEGIES.

Lords amendment: No. 30, in page 20, line 14, after ("Thames") insert ("safely")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 31 and 47.

Mr. Hill: It is good to be back at the Dispatch Box, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Amendment No. 30 responds to an Opposition amendment in another place. Its effect is to introduce the concept of safety as a factor that the mayor must consider in exercising his or her duty to promote and encourage use of the Thames.

Safety on the river is a matter that must be taken very seriously by all concerned. The inquiry currently being carried out by Lord Justice Clark will review the current arrangements for ensuring safety on the Thames, and consider this and other issues arising from the Marchioness disaster. The amendment does not seek in any way to prejudge the conclusions that the inquiry may reach but, in advance of those conclusions, it will flag specifically the need for the mayor to take safety matters into account in exercising his or her functions.

Lords amendment Nos. 31 and 47 deliver the Government's commitment to require the mayor to set targets on each of his or her strategies so that their progress can be measured and reviewed. Our intention that the mayor should do so was set out in the White Paper. Lords amendment No. 31 provides for the mayor to set such targets as he or she considers appropriate. Lords amendment No. 47 requires the mayor to set out the targets, and report on progress in achieving them in the GLA's annual report.

The targets for which the Lords amendments provide will enable Londoners to assess the strategies' ultimate aims, to track the progress in implementing each strategy, and to press the mayor to improve performance if they are not being met.

The mayor will be able to exercise his or her discretion in deciding the number and nature of targets for each strategy, but we do not intend him or her to set them in isolation. In setting targets, he or she must have regard to relevant national targets or objectives, and should not set targets that are less demanding. The mayor must also have regard to performance indicators that are set by the Secretary of State that impact on the authorities implementing the strategies.

Such a framework will enable Londoners to track the progress on implementing each mayoral strategy.

6.45 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: I apologise for detaining the House for a moment or two, but the Lords amendments relate to the Marchioness incident and its consequences, which, as the Minister rightly said, is a matter of importance.

Since the House last considered these matters, the Deputy Prime Minister has made an extremely welcome announcement that there is to be an inquiry into river safety on the Thames. Lord Justice Clark was asked to report initially on the general matter—ideally by the end of the year—and to consider whether to open a public inquiry into what happened on that terrible night when the Marchioness sank. As the House will know, many of us have been pushing for that inquiry, and welcomed it without qualification. We welcome too the Deputy Prime Minister's honouring of his commitment and Lord Justice Clark's work to date.

As the Minister rightly said, we must not prejudge the inquiry's recommendations. Therefore, for the moment, Lords amendment No. 30, which flags up the fact that the mayor should consider

"the desirability of promoting and encouraging the use of the River Thames safely",

is a useful signal.

The Minister, and his colleague the Minister for Housing and Planning, will know that there has been a long debate about the appropriate way of including a strategy for the river in the Bill. There is still a large body of opinion, which has been reflected in representations to Ministers in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and in amendments in the other place as well as here, in favour of such consideration.

I agreed entirely with the Deputy Prime Minister that the right way to proceed would be to flag up the issue, but to keep open the possibility that the Greater London Authority Act may need amendment before the Authority comes into operation in July. I shall explain why in a sentence or so. If Lord Justice Clark recommends that the GLA should be responsible for river safety and should co-ordinate search and rescue and other functions, it would be nonsense for it to begin operation without such legislative provision.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

I imagine that the Government will have no difficulty in achieving agreement among Liberal Democrats and other London Members in order that any amending legislation may proceed quickly but properly through both Houses in the time between publication of the inquiry report on river safety generally and the date on which the GLA comes into being in July.

The current position, in which no one is coherently responsible for safety on the river, cannot continue. The police do a good job but say that it is not all their responsibility and the port of London says the same. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) and others, not least the former hon. Member for Newham, South, Nigel Spearing, have tried for years to ensure that we have a coherent response on river safety. To achieve that may need amendment of this legislation. It would be a dereliction of duty if we did not do that.

I urge the Minister to reflect on the need for a wider Thames strategy. I know that the Government have rejected that so far, but I heard the most convincing arguments for it in a docklands forum meeting upstairs, from someone working for the London Planning Advisory Committee. Such a strategy would include not only the water but planning and other issues along the banks. I ask Ministers to take note of the wide body of opinion, represented to all of us who have riverside constituencies, that considers that to be an appropriate way forward.

I have been asked both by my constituents who operate commercial passenger transport on the river—not least those, such as the City Cruises company, who run the new Thames millennial services inaugurated by the Deputy Prime Minister—and by the wider corporate and private sector in London to make representations that they should be included in the consultation process. My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), our tourism spokesman, and others have received representations from people who operate tourism and leisure services and feel that they should be part of the process of ensuring that the river is as safe as possible.

I hope that Ministers will take those points on board. We may well need to return to the matter in the next Session, and I am sure that the Government will want to facilitate a window of legislative opportunity if we need to pass quick legislation to ensure that the Thames is safe in the future in a way that, tragically, it was not 10 years ago.

Mr. Hill: I am aware of the distinguished role that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has played in connection with the Marchioness disaster. He and I have made representations on the matter in the past and I pay tribute to him.

The Government recognise the importance and urgency of river safety. That is the very reason for the establishment of the Clark inquiry. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have made a commitment to embrace on an interim basis whatever recommendations the inquiry produces for precautions required for the millennium event on the Thames, but I cannot make any commitment to early legislation arising from that.

We shall have the opportunity to return to the subject of commercial and tourist services on the river at a later stage in our deliberations, when I hope to be able to offer some reassuring words.

The issue of a river strategy has been debated at five different stages of the Bill. We made it clear that the Government fully endorse the strategic importance of the Thames and recognise its value as a resource for London. We have in place our own strategic planning guidance for the river. Several policies, such as the Thames 2000 initiative, demonstrate our active efforts to bring life back to the river and restore it as the capital's focal point. We have also made it clear that we expect the mayor to press ahead with the Government's policies in this area. We have made a commitment to produce guidance to that effect in relation to the mayor's planning powers.

However, we have also pointed out that there are clear advantages in enshrining the mayor's policies for the Thames in the other strategy documents rather than compartmentalising them in a free-standing strategy for the river. That will ensure that the importance of the Thames is recognised across the whole spectrum of mayoral policies, and benefits from the specific powers and mechanisms that those strategies will carry with them for ensuring that the mayor's Thames policies are implemented.

Of course it will be open to the mayor to take a different view. If he or she considers that there are advantages in collating all policies relating to the Thames in a single document over and above the strategic planning guidance for the Thames that we expect to be contained in the spatial development strategy, and if the mayor wishes to call that document a Thames strategy, there is nothing to stop him or her doing so. That decision should be left for the mayor to take.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 31 agreed to.

Clause 35

PUBLICITY AND AVAILABILITY OF STRATEGIES

Lords amendment: No. 32, in page 21, line 27, after first ("to") insert ("the current version of")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 33 to 40, 48, 153, 213, 268 to 272, 424, 445, 446, 455, 483, 641 and 646.

Mr. Hill: Dealing with those amendments in the time available is an awesome challenge, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They tidy up and extend the arrangements for publicity and for the availability of strategies and other documents. The mayor will be required to keep a copy of the current version of each strategy, and the mayor's guidance document on application for bus service appointments, available for public inspection while they are in force.

The amendments specifying that it is the current version of those documents that should be kept available for inspection respond to concerns raised in Committee in the other place about requiring those documents to be available for a fixed period, which may have been shorter than the time for which they were in force. Following points raised in Committee in the other place, the mayor will have a duty to send each strategy to each London borough and the common council.

The amendments also require the strategies and the bus guidance document to be available for inspection at the GLA's principal offices and at such other places as the mayor considers appropriate, at reasonable hours and free of charge. Again, making the documents available at places other than the GLA's offices is a direct response to Opposition arguments in Committee in the other place.

The mayor will be required to keep copies of his or her annual report, the GLA's budget, substitute calculations—for example, a revised budget—the capital spending plan, Transport for London's annual report and the state of the environment report available for inspection for a period of six years from the date when each was first made available, at reasonable hours and free of charge at the GLA's principal offices.

Any person—that means organisations as well as individual members of the public—will have the right, on request, to be supplied with a copy of any of the documents, such as the strategies and all the other types of document, or any part of any of the documents, for such reasonable fee as the mayor may determine.

The amendments thus improve and extend the arrangements for the availability of published GLA documents, and respond to concerns raised in the other place.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 33 to 40 agreed to.

Clause 37

THE MAYOR'S MONTHLY REPORT TO THE ASSEMBLY

Lords amendment: No. 41, in page 22, line 2, after ("three") insert ("clear working")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 42 to 44, 46, 49 to 53, 58 to 80, 83, 86, 92 to 94, 97 to 102, 116, 117, 576, 581, 636 to 639, 642, 643 and 645.

Mr. Hill *rose—*

Further consideration of Lords amendments adjourned.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

To be further considered tomorrow.

Business Statement

7 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): In view of the lack of progress on the Bill tonight, I regret to tell the House that the first business on Monday will be consideration of a supplemental timetable motion to the Greater London Authority Bill, followed by consideration of Lords amendments. The rest of the business for Monday will be as I announced in my business statement earlier today.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): This further guillotine motion is yet more evidence of the Government's inability to draft Bills and to manage their legislative programme. With 818 Government amendments to the Greater London Authority Bill, they have overtaken the record set by the Scotland Bill for the most Government amendments to any legislation.

For poor drafting, the Greater London Authority Bill is without precedent. Moreover, the House finished its business early on Monday and Tuesday this week, but now the Government are having to rush through consideration of their remaining legislation. We have seen no filibustering this afternoon. Serious contributions have been made from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The announcement about the guillotine means that serious issues about transport in London run the risk of being inadequately considered. How much time will be allotted for debating the remaining sections of the Bill on Monday and what arrangements does the right hon. Lady propose to make for discussing the Food Standards Agency Bill? Is not the announcement she has just made an insult to London and to Londoners?

Mrs. Beckett: That is absolutely ridiculous, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. The Government have not hitherto sought to draw debate on the Bill to a close. Indeed, we have had agreed progress of business throughout the previous consideration of the legislation. We offered a programme motion today and we sought reasonably rapid progress, but we have disposed of only six out of 56 groups of amendments. I remind the House, and those Opposition Members who probably do not know much about the Bill, that the Government have sought to reverse only one amendment made in the other place, although some amendments have been tidied up to bring them into order, as the House would expect.

The right hon. Gentleman said that there was no filibuster, but the first group of amendments today covered an issue that has already been extensively aired in the House in previous consideration of the Bill. The debate took four hours.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Does the Leader of the House not recognise that the Government brought to the House the most complicated Bill—with the largest number of clauses and schedules perhaps ever, and certainly for a long time—and we have a booklet containing 820 amendments from the other place over 197 pages? For right hon. and hon. Members to spend a little time considering those amendments and putting their views to the House is entirely proper and in order.

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

We have a complex Bill with many amendments, but the Leader of the House now says that she wishes to curtail discussion and restrict Members' ability to influence what is vital legislation.

We have seen no filibuster, but we have had sensible, sound discussion. Does the Leader of the House not recognise that, with 56 groups of amendments—50 of which are still outstanding—it is outrageous for the House to be expected to complete that business in one day? Will she consider extending the length of time available to Members to deal with the Bill?

Mrs. Beckett: We did the devolution legislation, which was also long and complex, on programme motions. The Government are prepared, and happy, to agree programme motions and the sensible progress of business. The hon. Gentleman is a newer Member and will not recall, for example, the passage of the Railways Act 1993 or the Water Act 1989. Those Bills were less than half the size of the Greater London Authority Bill and hundreds of amendments were tabled to them. In the case of the Railways Act 1993, some 470 amendments came back to the Commons.

We allowed two full days. We were perfectly prepared to make progress, and we hoped to make progress reasonably rapidly. I can tell the hon. Gentleman only that we have not done so.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): The Leader of the House conceded at business questions this morning that there were problems with the Bill and, by my standards, I behaved like a Trappist monk this afternoon. Will the Leader of the House say how much time she is going to give us for the rest of the very dense business that remains to be done?

Mrs. Beckett: The motion to be tabled tomorrow will be discussed through the usual channels. However, the right hon. Gentleman will know that we are trying, as we have tried throughout, to arrange discussion of the Bill so that major issues can be properly considered. We shall continue to do so.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Sh[illegible]ey): I have been in and out of the Chamber all day, and have listened to all of today's debate. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the programme motion. The wittering of Opposition Members is astonishing to hear, and their crocodile tears continue to flow. I welcome the motion and hope that we will see more sensible management of Government business for the rest of the Parliament.

Mrs. Beckett: Well, we all share that hope. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Government are always keen to proceed through agreement, proper discussion and properly tabled debate. However, there are times when the Government recognise that that progress cannot be achieved without a guillotine motion.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): No doubt for the best of reasons, the Leader of the House has not been in the Chamber at all during today's proceedings. Nevertheless, the right hon. Lady has asserted that there has been time wasting and inadequate progress on the Bill, and I invite her to demonstrate how she believes that that has happened. How does she relate that to the completely inadequate amount of time that she proposes to allow the House properly to consider the mess of a Bill that the Government have inflicted on us today, and will inflict on us again on Monday?

Mrs. Beckett: I remind the right hon. Gentleman of what I said earlier. We spent four hours on the first group of amendments, discussing a matter that had been debated extensively already. The Government are not seeking to change more than one of the amendments that have come from another place.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Does the Leader of the House not recognise that, in the time that she is going to make available, it would not be possible to read into the record the details of the amendments that have still to be considered, much less debate them or give them serious consideration?

Does the right hon. Lady not understand also that, although the Prime Minister's contempt for Parliament is well established, the programme motion shows contempt for the British public, and that they will note that?

Mrs. Beckett: That is absolute rubbish. The right hon. Gentleman is not a new Member of Parliament, and he knows perfectly well that there has probably never been legislation for which it would have been possible to read into the record all the details of the amendments and still complete the debate. Moreover, in Standing Committee, on Report, in Lords Committee and on Third Reading—

Sir Brian Mawhinney: There are 900 amendments.

Mrs. Beckett: There is no need for the right hon. Gentleman to shout, as I can hear him quite well. The vast majority of the amendments tabled to the Bill at all its stages were tabled by the Opposition. That is perfectly proper, and I make no complaint about it. However, if we tried to read amendments into the record, we really would be wasting our time.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: That is a contempt of the House.

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman is displaying contempt, as well as bad manners.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I have been involved in the deliberations on the Bill at every stage of its progress through the House. I was in the Chamber throughout this afternoon's discussion and can tell the Leader of the House that there was no filibustering. There is a huge amount of detail in the Bill, which is very important to my constituents and to the people of London. Will the right hon. Lady consider whether it would be more appropriate for the House to continue debating the Bill tomorrow, instead of debating family-friendly employment?

Mrs. Beckett: I would simply say to the hon. Gentleman what I have told the House already. The Government offered a programme motion to achieve

agreed progress in the debate so as to deal with matters in an orderly fashion, exactly as the hon. Gentleman described. As he will know, that is how all the rest of the proceedings on the Bill have been conducted. I am sorry that it has not been possible to carry that orderliness through to the end.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): There was laughter in the House when you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, read the list of amendments just before 7 o'clock. That had nothing to do with the dignity of the Chair. It stemmed from incredulity at the contempt that the Government have shown to the House in proposing to force through a Bill on which 51 groups of amendments are still outstanding. The group that we are currently discussing contains 22 separate amendments. We are debating 197 pages of amendments. Does the right hon. Lady really think that that is good government?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry to have to say that I understand that the hon. Gentleman has not been present for the debate. I would simply point out that we have looked into the issue. He should know that the vast majority of the amendments are technical. He must also know, as he has been a Member for a long time, that there is nothing unprecedented about what the Government are doing. Many pieces of legislation have, unfortunately, required hundreds of amendments at this stage. I repeat that the Government sought a programme motion and sought to make orderly progress. That has not been possible and so we have to take steps.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. That is quite enough on a single-item Government statement.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an unprecedented occasion—a Government Bill with 900 Government amendments. Comparatively few Members wished to question the Leader of the House on her totally inadequate statement. The right hon. Lady did not even tell the House of how much time we will have to devote to the Bill on Monday. We are to go away for the weekend with no idea of how much time we will have to debate the Bill, still less the Food Standards Bill, which is also important. We simply do not know what is happening on Monday.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This was a single-item business statement. The other matters—the suitability of what has happened and so forth—can be debated on the allocation of time motion on Monday.

Campbeltown-Ballycastle Ferry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

7.12 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the future of the Campbeltown-Ballycastle ferry service and I welcome the Minister, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), to the Dispatch Box. It gives me some confidence to see him there as he knows something about the subject and will, I hope, understand what I am talking about. For that reason, it will not be necessary to go into the detail of the background.

Suffice it to say, as the Minister will recall, that expenditure was approved for infrastructure at Campbeltown and similarly for Ballycastle and Rathlin island following various meetings that we had with the Northern Ireland Transport Minister way back in October 1994. However, the then Secretary of State for Scotland was determined that if a link were established, it should be run by a private operator. He was most reluctant to allow Caledonian MacBrayne to take it on for various reasons, as spelled out in a letter to me in 1995.

I draw the Minister's attention to the then Secretary of State's answer. He acknowledged that Caledonian MacBrayne was

"enjoined, as one of the strategic objectives set by the Secretary of State, to consider, and, where appropriate, exploit commercial opportunities outwith the approved services."

However, he went on to say:

"The role of the public sector in the economy should be restricted, and services whenever possible should be provided by the private sector rather than the public sector."

At the time, in the absence of any real interest from private sector operators, it seemed sensible to allow Caledonian MacBrayne to take on the route. It had the experience, the staff, the recruitment base and the boat.

Need I remind the Minister of his own words in the *Official Report* of 3 July 1996? During Scottish questions, the hon. Gentleman asked the then Scottish Minister:

"Is not the main obstacle that Ministers must overcome their quite irrational prejudice against anything operating in the public sector? Does not everyone involved in the project . . . agree that the sensible thing to do is to allow Caledonian MacBrayne to operate a vessel that it owns?"—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1996; Vol. 280, c. 970.]

All that is history. Fortunately, Sea Containers made an offer to run the service through its subsidiary, the Argyll and Antrim Steam Packet Company. The company entered into a contract to operate for three years during July, August and September, and, if possible, to extend the service to nine months a year from the third year. That has not happened, and it is no secret that the company has not broken even.

The inaugural voyage on 1 July 1997 was launched by the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (Mr. Dewar), now the First Minister in Scotland. There was much rejoicing and good will, and many expressions of confidence and support, particularly from the right hon. Gentleman. There can be no doubt that the service has bestowed both financial and community benefits on the Kintyre area during the difficult years during which it has run. In the first year, there was no prior promotion of the service. The second was a disaster for tourism because of

[Mrs. Ray Michie]

the strong pound, the world cup, atrocious weather and an unsettled situation in Northern Ireland. Kintyre also had to contend with the closure of its main road following a huge landslide.

I cannot stress too strongly the need for the service to continue for the benefit of both Antrim and Argyll. I, of course, know more about Kintyre, an area that relies on primary industries such as agriculture, which, particularly in the dairy sector, is currently suffering great stress. The sight of more and more farmers having to give up is too heartbreaking to contemplate. It is also difficult to attract inward investment. The closure of the Machrihanish air base and the Campbeltown shipyard were real blows to the community. There is a high rate of long-term unemployment.

Shipping services between Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom are properly the concern of the Westminster Parliament, which is why we are holding this debate. The Campbeltown to Ballycastle service connects two fragile parts of the UK that are encountering considerable difficulties. The service unites a common culture, offering opportunities to strengthen ties not only between Antrim and the west of Scotland, but with the whole of Ireland.

What is to be done? In search of a way forward, Argyll and Bute council and Moyle district council held talks last Friday with Hamish Ross of the Argyll and Antrim Steam Packet Company and with Argyll and the Islands Enterprise. The promotion of tourism is vital to the service. Although better marketing this year, co-ordinated by the local tourist board, resulted in a marked increase in the number of vehicles using the service this summer—some 23 per cent. more vehicles used the service in July, and the August figure was up 19 per cent.—the route still operates at a loss.

The ferry's introduction has had an effect. Bob Chicken—whom I know the Minister has met—has said, on behalf of the Kintyre marketing group, that it is absolutely essential for the morale of the area that the ferry service should continue. Much depends on business morale, which was substantially boosted on the launch of the service. The area got new investment in hotels and previous negative reports from Campbeltown were replaced by very positive ones.

There is no doubt that a strengthened overall marketing strategy is needed on both sides of the water, with a pricing structure that provides a range of more competitive fares to potential ferry users. I was grateful to the roads service in Belfast for responding to requests from me and others for better signs to the ferry. Earlier this year that work was completed, with 15 signs giving directions to the ferry. That was welcome.

Particularly at the beginning, I was also keen to promote the transport of freight, including animals and the export of sheep, cattle and pigs. Kintyre farmers, who strongly supported the service, wanted to build up business with the Province. I then discovered that Ballycastle was not designated as an import port. I asked the then Scottish Minister, Lord Sewel, to take it up with the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture. Eventually, the import licences were amended. I was grateful for that, but, of course, there has been little benefit to the farming industry since.

There is another freight option. I have a letter from the director of transport for Argyll and Bute council, who says:

"An option, presently being explored with forestry interests in Argyll and Bute which could significantly aid the financial viability of the service, is the establishment of a complementary freight service between Campbeltown and Troon to facilitate the shipment of timber to the pulp mill at Irvine."

Troon is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ayr (Ms Osborne), so both she and the Minister know all about it. I do not know whether that idea is feasible, but it is certainly worth examining. A massive amount of timber is due to be harvested in Argyll and some at least should be transported by sea because the damage to the roads and hundreds of small bridges will result in huge repair and maintenance costs. That is yet another burden for a cash-strapped council.

Can we find a way forward for the company to continue? I hope that we can. If Sea Containers withdraws, the only option seems to be Caledonian MacBrayne, but how do we get the boat back? As the Minister said in his letter to me:

"If Caledonian MacBrayne wish to seek permission to develop services outside their traditional area, they would, of course, require to seek the permission of the Scottish Executive as the First Minister is now the sole shareholder in the company."

Of course, as the sole shareholder the First Secretary has the power, but I would expect the Minister to do all that he can with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Northern Ireland Office and the Scottish Executive to ensure that this service continues.

Kintyre is a very vulnerable area. As Ken Abernethy, the chief executive of Argyll and the Islands Enterprise has stated:

"We do not know of any better way of changing the framework of the economy than retaining the direct employment and the throughput of visitors generated by the ferry."

I know that the Minister is sympathetic. He said so in his recent letter to me. So is Dr. James Hunter, the chairman of Highlands and the Islands Enterprise. In a letter to me last year, he said:

"Argyll and the Islands Enterprise have recently agreed to make Kintyre their top priority."

However, the company cannot make Kintyre a top priority without the proper support. I am told that support cannot be forthcoming because the ferry is not a lifeline service. I suggest that it is and should be made a lifeline service just as much as the Dunoon-Gourock service is. Kintyre is a peninsula. The people in Campbeltown always feel that they are at the end of the line and that they might as well be an island. I look for the service to be developed into a lifeline service.

I am certainly not being disrespectful if I say that I do not want tea and sympathy. Argyll waited long enough for a change of Government and some hope for the future. The withdrawal of the Campbeltown-Ballycastle ferry line would be indefensible. I ask the Minister to do all in his power to see that that does not happen.

7.25 pm

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) on securing the debate and putting the case so eloquently. I can probably cut short the debate by saying that I am happy to give the undertaking that she

seeks. I will do everything that I can to support the outcome towards which she is working and towards which, as she generously acknowledged, I have a record of working.

I go back a long way with the service. I remember travelling on its predecessor from Campbeltown to Red Bay in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The service did not stop for lack of demand; it was a successful service. It stopped only because the difficulties at that time made it undesirable to the authorities to have another port of entry and egress from Northern Ireland. It took a long time for the service to be re-established, and I fully endorse the hon. Lady's comment that it would be a tragedy if it were to be lost at this stage. Its potential has not been fulfilled and it needs time to be developed.

Just to get the constitutional context right, we are discussing the Ballycastle-Campbeltown service tonight because the service is not a devolved matter for the Scottish Parliament. The service does not begin and end in Scotland so it is properly a matter for this House to discuss. I must say that this is the form of devolution that I prefer—two people from Argyll talking about this sort of matter and agreeing on virtually everything. However, some aspects of the debate inevitably impinge on the powers of the Scottish Parliament and Executive, especially the ownership of Caledonian MacBrayne, if it enters the frame again as a player.

No one would dispute that the subsidy that goes to the services provided for the Scottish islands and other communities cannot be used to cross-subsidise a service outside the Caledonian MacBrayne undertaking. The nub of the matter for Caledonian MacBrayne, as for anyone else, is whether the service can be made viable or can garner support in other ways long enough for it to become viable. The idea of subsidising it through the block grant to the company is a matter for the Scottish Executive and in particular the First Minister. That certainly was not the proposition in 1994. The service was intended to be unsubsidised. Part of the folly of what was done then was that Caledonian MacBrayne did not ask for money to set up the service. However, because it had the power of a network behind it and owned the ship, it would have been infinitely better placed to run the service than the people who were invited in.

Sea Containers Ltd., through its subsidiary, has operated the service for the past three seasons, as per its agreement. It is well known that the company is involved in a series of meetings with all interested parties to seek a way forward that would enable the route to continue and develop. Everyone knows the possible outcomes of the discussions, but it is important to note, and it is only fair to the company to stress, that as I speak it has not withdrawn from the service or announced that the service will cease.

The service has been provided by Sea Containers without any direct subsidy, but it has operated free from harbour dues at both ports. Despite that, it is generally acknowledged that the company has been losing money on the service—during the past year, it appears to have lost a significant amount. The company had hoped that demand would increase over time so as to make the service viable. This year, the local tourist board, the local enterprise company—Argyll and the Isles Enterprise—and the Argyll and Bute council supported a £150,000 marketing campaign to increase the use of the service. I have not seen much evidence that the marketing campaign was funded in that way—at least at the Scottish end.

There has been a modest effect. Figures given to me suggest that the average carriage on each journey has risen from about 45 passengers and 10 vehicles to 54 passengers and 13 vehicles. That is quite a large percentage increase, but it is clearly not enough to put the service on a secure footing. Equally clearly, it does not come within a mile of the service's potential. Inevitably, there are difficult matters for us to consider, and we should do so as constructively as possible.

We should not get hung up on the phrase "lifeline service". This is not a lifeline service in the normally agreed sense—for example, it is not like the service to Colinsay or to Barra. It is an important service, but we should not be trapped into using terminology that cannot be justified in the context of discussions of ferry services in general.

What can we do? The debate is especially useful, because it focuses attention on the difficulties, and adds to the momentum to find a constructive outcome that is shared by all people of good will towards the service. That is the theme of my remarks this evening. However, there is no easy answer; there are difficulties everywhere we look. There are difficulties with the subsidy, with the current operators, with CalMac—not least because it no longer owns the ferry that operates the service, as the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute realises—and with EU rules on state aids and public service obligations. There are many complexities, but none of them—individually or collectively—makes a case for washing our hands of the problem. Nothing that I say tonight should be interpreted in that way—indeed, the contrary is true.

I have written to the Scottish Executive about the service, and about the interface of interests between my Department and the Executive. They are well aware of the difficulties with the Ballycastle to Campbeltown service. I have also held discussions with the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill); I am extremely pleased that he is in the Chamber this evening. He has responsibilities for shipping and can be relied on to take a constructive view of the matters that we are discussing. I have also initiated discussions with the Northern Ireland Office, which has a large role in the matter. I am pleased to note that the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) is in the Chamber.

We have reached the stage at which we are investigating all the options. At present, no one should put up any barriers to the continuation of discussions on the identification of possible solutions. I hope that we shall have time for those discussions.

As the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute pointed out, the Government have inherited an unfortunate situation that resulted from the refusal of the previous Administration to allow Caledonian MacBrayne to operate on the route. At that time, CalMac owned the ferry—the Claymore—and was anxious to proceed with the service. I understand that it is on record, recently, that the CalMac management is still anxious to proceed. However, it was prohibited from doing so; instead, the Claymore was handed over to Sea Containers Ltd.

We now need to find other ways to make progress. I assure the hon. Lady that if the Scottish Office—with other Departments and Government agencies—can play a

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

part in finding a solution, we are more than willing to do so. I offer my personal commitment to working towards a successful outcome.

I have no doubt that this service is important to both Kintyre and Northern Ireland. Its potential has not yet been fully realised, and it would be a tragedy if it were withdrawn after so much commitment and public money have been invested in it. Some £8 million has been invested in harbour improvements so that the service can operate. To give up and write off that kind of money after three years is not a sound investment.

This is a niche service with a tiny share of the overall market, but it is important to the communities involved. Because the service operates outside Scotland, it is properly the concern of the United Kingdom Government, and I am already in touch with the various Departments, the Scottish Executive and the appropriate agencies with a view to establishing how we can assist. It is important to stress that, as of today, the present operators have made no statement on their future intentions.

There are many avenues to explore. The hon. Lady referred to the possible involvement of an Ayrshire link. I should have preferred her to mention Ardrossan, but I shall have a word with her about that later. Going back to the original proposition, I was involved in meetings with the Northern Ireland Office a long time ago, and the intention was that, had CalMac been operating, it would have made perfect sense to have involved Ardrossan because it already has a base there. Once the service was taken away from CalMac, however, that fell through.

Thus there is the possibility of an Ayrshire link and the environmental benefit from transporting timber between Kintyre and Arran by sea rather than by road. It is also worth stating that there is the general drive, to which I am committed, to improve and widen the links, whether they are infrastructural, economic, social or cultural, between Scotland and the north and south of Ireland. We want to increase those links as much as we can, and this ferry service is an important link between two interesting and historically linked geographical and cultural communities. We now have something that binds them physically. I entirely endorse the view that it should not be lost lightly, and I give my personal commitment to doing everything possible to maintain it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 5 November 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Family Friendly Employment Policies

[Relevant document: The Ninth Report from the Social Security Committee of Session 1998-99, on the Social Security Implications of Parental Leave (HC 543).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Mike Hall.*]

9.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Alan Johnson): The Employment Relations Act 1999 establishes and fosters a new culture in the workplace. The world is changing, and the workplace has changed with it. More people are working part time, and the composition of the work force is also changing. More women than ever are working, and returning to work after having a baby. Some 52 per cent. of married women with a child under five work, which is more than twice the number of a generation ago.

More families depend on two earners, and attitudes are changing. British people want civilised employment rights and decent jobs, not because they want to spend their whole life at work but as an essential element of a fulfilled life outside the workplace. Fathers want to play a more important role in raising their children, and women want support in balancing their work and family life.

Different working patterns and the changing make-up of the work force have put new responsibilities on us all—in Government as well as in business. It is up to us to ensure minimum standards of fairness and decency in the workplace. Businesses that want to be successful will embrace this agenda.

The Government's employment relations settlement is forward looking, and provides fundamental decent minimum standards based on partnership and underpinned by law. We reject a hire and fire culture in favour of employers and employees working in partnership towards a better climate of employment relations. We are extending the safety net of basic employment protection rights to reflect the diversity in today's work force. It is wrong that some workers are being denied basic civil rights at work. Insecurity at work is one of the principal causes of the tension and unhappiness that can lead to a breakdown of family relationships. We are determined to address this issue, not only for workers in conventional employment but for so-called atypical workers, such as home workers and agency workers or workers on fixed-term contracts, many of whom choose those working arrangements to fit in with their family commitments.

Part timers will be guaranteed the same rights as full timers, and we will enhance the status of part-time work. We are undertaking a review of the temporary work sector to benefit both workers and hirers, and we are giving security to all workers when a company changes hands.

Our policy is about treating people fairly and being, to use the Royal College of Nursing's term, employee friendly as well as family friendly for those with family commitments. It is about providing decent standards and rights at work to help people balance their work and family commitments, laying down minimum entitlements in law but promoting a partnership approach for higher standards and underpinning our policies by providing financial support to low-income families.

Business benefits from putting in place decent standards. Security at work makes for a better motivated, versatile and stable work force. Investing in people can lead to improvements in the bottom line from customer satisfaction to company profits. Employees who think that they are being treated fairly by management are prepared to go the extra mile for their employers. Policies that help people to balance their work and home lives can help improve recruitment and retention, and reduce the costs of absenteeism.

One of the main challenges facing parents is how to juggle the responsibility of bringing up a family while holding down a job—how to respond to the demands of a difficult job and the demands of young children. Balances have to be struck rather than sacrifices made. Starting to have a family should not mean the end of a promising career. Management understanding about balancing work and family responsibilities can be the key to employee satisfaction and commitment. We need to introduce family friendly policies into the workplace, and we have begun the process in just over two years in office.

We intend to go further. This week, we have laid regulations before the House that will introduce a new right to 13 weeks' parental leave. This is a significant advance: for the first time, fathers as well as mothers will be entitled to have leave to look after their children. For the very first time, leave will be granted to adoptive parents. There will be special provisions for parents of disabled children. Parents should not have to face the dilemma of choosing between being a good parent or holding down a job.

Our parental leave scheme achieves a fair and sensible balance between the needs of business and the work force. We have kept our promise and implemented the regulations with a light touch. We are guaranteeing minimum standards, but we want employers to go beyond these standards where they can. Employers and employees, or their representatives, will be able to build on the foundations that we lay.

We have also recognised that there will be times when agreement cannot be reached. In such cases, a default scheme will come into effect, guaranteeing that all employees will be able to exercise their basic rights.

In our White Paper entitled "Fairness at Work", we gave a commitment to improve and simplify maternity rights, and we are honouring that pledge. We are increasing the length of ordinary maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks, and reducing the qualifying period for additional maternity leave from two years to one year. More women will be able to spend more time at home with their new babies. Our improvements to maternity leave rights ensure that the UK's maternity leave provisions remain generous, even compared with those of

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other member states. We have also aimed to bring clarity to this complex area of law by simplifying notice procedures and making it clear that contracts of employment continue during additional maternity leave.

As part of our family friendly policies, we want to encourage a working environment where employees' needs are recognised, whether those employees are responsible for young children or dependent adults. More than 2.5 million people in the UK combine paid employment with providing informal care.

We want people who want to work to be able to do so, safe in the knowledge that their dependants are being cared for. However, when things go wrong—a child falls ill, the nurse or child minder fails to turn up or the dependant is involved in an accident—we want employees to be able to take time off to deal with such emergencies, and, importantly, to be able to do so without fearing victimisation by their employer. We recognise that most companies already provide time off in such circumstances. That is encouraging, but it is important that we provide such facilities where employers have a less enlightened approach. From 15 December, all employees will be entitled to a new right to take time off for family emergencies, and not to be treated unfairly or dismissed for exercising it.

Part-time work can also make a difference for employees who are balancing their work and family life. It also provides employers with a flexible work force capable of meeting the demands of an increasingly 24-hour consumer society. In the next few days, we will publish for consultation draft regulations and guidance that will tackle discrimination against part-time workers and promote opportunities for part-time work.

Part-time workers will no longer be treated as second-class citizens. We will guarantee equal pay pro rata for part timers, as well as equal terms and conditions. Unscrupulous employers will no longer be able to discriminate against workers just because they work fewer hours. Taken together, the regulations and guidance should help men and women to move between full-time and part-time work as their circumstances change. They will also increase the number of people who will be willing to vary their hours to help suit their employer's needs. People will recognise that part-time work is a valuable asset to the business, as well as to the employee. We want employees to work reasonable hours, in a way that suits them and the business.

British men have by far the longest working hours in Europe, and fathers with dependent children work the longest hours of all. Working excessive hours can take its toll on family life, with costs for society. There is no advantage to employers in having exhausted employees: 30 per cent. of sick leave is related to stress, anxiety and depression. Stress at work is costly to business and families. It is wrong to portray the British worker as a demented workaholic. He or she wants to be treated fairly and to be secure at work and successful in his or her career, but as part of a satisfying and fulfilled life away from the workplace.

In the working time regulations, the Government have taken action to support working families by tackling the long hours culture and giving workers more time to spend with their families. There are seven basic rights: no worker can be forced to work more than 48 hours on average; we have given a right to paid annual leave, rising from three to four weeks later this month; we have given a right to rest breaks during the working day; there is a right to rest breaks from work, including the right to a day off a week; we have given special protection to night workers, including the right to health assessments; we have created special protections for adolescent workers; and there is also protection from unfair dismissal or detriment for asserting those rights.

British workers should not have to work excessive hours to provide basic support for their families.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister pointed out that British men work the longest hours in Europe. Now that we have the fastest rising tax burden in Europe, is there not a danger that people might be pressed into working longer hours merely to sustain the same standard of living?

Mr. Johnson: No. It is not only a matter of working longer hours than the rest of Europe. In Finland, only 1.5 per cent of workers work more than 48 hours; in Luxembourg, the proportion is 3 per cent. and in France, 14 per cent. In the UK, the figure is 28.6 per cent. The problem is horrendous and too serious to be wrapped up in minor political points on other issues.

The Government are delivering on their promises to make work pay and to provide better financial support for low-income families. The minimum wage came into force on 1 April this year and has had a significant impact. Nearly 2 million workers—more than 1.2 million of whom are women—and their families have benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage. Thanks to the minimum wage, Britain is no longer a country where Scrooge employers can freely exploit their workers through poverty pay and get away with it.

Our working families tax credit will provide a guaranteed minimum income of more than £200 a week for working families earning the national minimum wage. Our child care tax credit will make child care more affordable for working families, benefiting about 400,000 families and underpinning our national child care strategy. The new deal for lone parents will help them overcome barriers to work and so enhance not only their lives but those of their families. We have announced the largest ever uprating of child benefit and are extending access to income support for low-paid couples who are taking parental leave.

The Government are ending the scandal of poverty pay. We are removing the roadblocks on the road from welfare to work by addressing the shortage of marketable skills, the failure of the tax and benefits system to make work worth while, the poverty and employment traps that mean for many that work does not pay, the lack of employment opportunities and the scarcity of affordable child care.

With our employment relations package, we are laying down minimum standards in law. We need to encourage employers to build on our provisions and understand that family friendly employment policies are good news for families and good news for business. In the coming months, the Government will pursue a campaign to promote good practice in balancing work and home commitments among employers and to encourage businesses to go beyond the legal minimum in their own interests.

We will seek to change the culture of the workplace by working with the business community. We are already working with the private and public sectors to share best practice in family friendly policies through partnership across the national health service and the retail industry. With their many female employees and 24-hour, round-the-clock services, those sectors have much to gain from increased sharing of best practice in successfully implementing flexible work patterns that help people to balance their jobs and homes.

Partnership is the cornerstone of our modernising agenda. We will not change attitudes in the workplace without a partnership approach. The case for partnership at work makes good business sense, creates greater social equity and helps enhance UK competitiveness. Our partnership fund will help employers and employees to work better together. We want the fund to act as a catalyst for change and are particularly encouraging ideas based on family friendly policies and on how the partnership approach might benefit small businesses in drawing up, for example, work force agreements on parental leave.

In time, our family friendly employment policies will be seen as fundamental rights in the labour market—as fundamental as the Equal Pay Act 1970, the right to maternity leave, and health and safety protection. For now, the measures that we are introducing on the back of the Employment Relations Act 1999 will help to improve the day-to-day working lives of individuals, support family life, and encourage the beginning of a culture change in the workplace, based on partnership, for the millennium and beyond.

I hope that all parties in the House will join us in our quest. It was once said, perhaps unfairly, that the Conservatives' approach to family friendly policies was summed up by their belief that a creche was something that happened between two Range Rovers in Tunbridge Wells. I hope that that has changed and that their Front-Bench team will demonstrate that today.

9.50 am

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I was about to welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box for the second day running; it is a great pleasure to see him there again, especially as he had such a wonderful write up in today's papers, following his debut at Department of Trade and Industry questions yesterday. However, I must also say—in response to his rather good joke—that we are looking forward to more jokes from him; it will provide a light touch that we shall welcome. No one could ever accuse me of confusing the words "crash" and "creche", any more than I confuse "rates" and "rats". I look forward to more engagements with him from the Dispatch Box.

It is somewhat ironic that the Government have chosen to debate family friendly policies during a week in which they faced the forces of conservatism, who protected from the Government's policy the interests of some of the most vulnerable members of the family—widows and people with disabilities. All those people are members of families.

I begin with the specific damage that will be done to elderly and frail members of families by the Government's employment policies. In talking of family policy, our focus is often on children and the responsibility of working parents; we can all understand that. However, children grow up and, all too often, the balance of juggling work and care for elderly parents and other relatives becomes the main challenge in people's lives. It is often difficult for adult children because they may live at a distance from their elderly relatives.

Many people take comfort from the fact that extra care—often provided by staff from employment agencies—helps their elderly relatives to maintain a good quality of life, especially in their own homes. On 30 September this year, the Government concluded a consultation process on changes to all employment agencies in the private sector. Some of those agencies provide live-in carers and others who ensure that the frail elderly and the disabled are able to live independently and safely. The Government now propose to make changes to the way in which agencies employ those staff, especially in the way that value added tax is levied.

On 29 September, at the end of the consultation process, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pointing out that there is great concern about what he intends to do, and about its impact on those specialist agencies and on their staff who provide care for a vulnerable group of people. At present, the agency pays VAT on its own component of the cost to the end user—the salary of the carer is free of VAT. However, the proposals in the Government document would change that. In future, the employment status of the carer will change; a carer will register as an employee of a particular agency. That means that carers will not be able to take up work from a range of agencies. The effect on the number of carers who will then be available for such work is self-evident. Agencies will also have to pass on to the elderly person the full VAT costs of salary. Unlike a business, an elderly person would have no way of reclaiming that VAT.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Is it clear from the Government's consultations, or from their response, whether the same applies to the highly paid actors and pop stars who are so welcome at No. 10? Do their agents have to treat those stars as though they were employees, or is there one rule for the rich and another for the poor?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I have seen no evidence that the Government have held consultations on that group of people. However, we are now close to a decision on carers that will affect many families throughout the country. I share with the Minister the comments and concerns of people involved in the caring industry.

I quote from an article in the *Recruiter*, which represents those who work in the industry. The article states:

"As self-employed workers, our carers dictate to us which assignments they will accept and how, when and where they will be prepared to work.

They come to us specifically in order to have this flexibility and do not wish to relinquish it. At present our carers are paid considerably more than the minimum wage, but their fees would have to be cut to keep costs down."

The article continues:

"the nature of the business was such that work for carers could not be guaranteed"—

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because of the changes the Government intend to make and because, normally—

"carers have to register with more than one agency, sometimes several.

If their status changed . . . many would be lost to the caring industry, which was already severely under-staffed."

Mr. Alan Johnson: I understand the genuine concern about that matter. Will the hon. Lady accept that the burden of employment—with everything that that entails for health and safety and responsibility for employment rights—should fall not on the person in need of care, but on the agency that recruits the carer?

Mrs. Browning: Of course, we are aware that the consultation document shows that the Government are trying to protect carers from any form of exploitation or outside responsibility. However, their proposals will put carers in danger, despite the fact that the document claimed that that was not the case.

Mr. Johnson *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. However, I quote from a letter sent to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry from a London agency, which is most concerned. The letter states:

"By insisting that bureaux such as ourselves become employment businesses as opposed to employment agencies Regulation 7(1) would mean that the cost of care would increase drastically and well beyond the reach of all but wealthy clients . . . Most significantly VAT would be chargeable on the whole of this increased amount (rather than, as at present, the agency fee element only). It seems nonsensical that an elderly person who receives Attendance Allowance would have to give more than the amount of that benefit back to the Government in VAT."

Members of the DTI Front-Bench team are known for their frequent use of the words "fairness" and "justice". The Minister is new to the Front Bench, but he will have followed his Secretary of State's words on various subjects and will know that fairness and justice are parroted regularly by his ministerial colleagues. However, there is nothing fair or just to the elderly in the policy that the Government propose.

The agency's letter continues:

"Small specialist agencies such as ourselves will be squeezed out of the market. Some of the most vulnerable in our society would be denied the choice to purchase care from such specialist agencies, who provide a high level, one to one personal service . . . This does not seem to accord with the stated aims of this Government."

Although the hon. Gentleman makes the point that the purpose of the consultation document's proposals was to protect the frail elderly from any form of exploitation, in practice, the Government's very policies will do the opposite.

Mr. Johnson: This is an important point. Some employment agencies have legitimate concerns, but others have illegitimate concerns. Last week, an article in *The Economist* states of unnamed agencies that

"The agencies think this bureaucratic burden"—

by which they mean paying the national minimum wage and complying with employment law and the working time directive—

"is all the more unnecessary because many carers come from abroad, mainly the Commonwealth."

Those are not legitimate concerns. Such agencies are looking to avoid their responsibilities.

Mrs. Browning: Wherever the staff come from, the fact remains that there are people who live in their own homes at the moment and receive care from other people, who come in to help them get up in the morning and put them to bed at night. Sometimes, extremely frail people or those who are severely disabled have full-time, live-in carers. Those carers will now be subject to VAT on their salaries, which was not formerly the case.

When the Minister was asked about that matter at DTI questions yesterday, he replied that representations were being made to the Treasury by DTI Ministers. He may not have had as much experience as Opposition Members in dealing with former Treasury Ministers—of whom he numbers three among his colleagues in the DTI ministerial team. They do not have a good track record on facing down their Treasury colleagues on taxation policy, where the Treasury is seen to be a net gainer, while others are the losers. If this is a battle between the Treasury, which wants to raise more VAT revenue—clearly it will do so—and DTI Ministers, who are standing up for the interests of those people whom their legislation will affect, I tell the Minister, in the strongest terms, that his duty should be to go to those Treasury Ministers, with his colleagues, and fight as hard as they possibly can for a proper solution to a potentially serious and damaging policy. That policy will affect the most vulnerable members of families throughout the country.

Mr. Bottomley: May I help my hon. Friend to make the Minister understand? Normally, when an employment agency charges VAT, it charges a business that can recover the VAT because it sells goods to a customer. However, in this case, the only customer is a person who is frail, elderly or handicapped. I should be grateful if the Minister intervened again in my hon. Friend's speech to say that he understands that the VAT will fall on the frail, the elderly or the handicapped, who are normally on low incomes, rather than on businesses that can pass on the charge to customers.

Mr. Johnson *rose—*

Mrs. Browning: I give way to the Minister.

Mr. Johnson: This is strange. I am not quite accustomed to the procedures—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Because the hon. Lady took an intervention from her hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley), it is for her to give way to the Minister at a later stage. This is not Question Time.

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall make a little progress, then give the Minister an opportunity to answer specifically the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing,

West (Mr. Bottomley) and me. It is important that Department of Trade and Industry Ministers, who are in the driving seat of the policy, fully understand their responsibilities and make proper representations to Treasury Ministers.

Let us consider what the policy is likely to cost and how individuals will be affected. It has been calculated by the Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services that the policy will increase the cost of care by about £1 an hour, so people who need four hours help a day will face an increase of £28 a week. We all know the sort of incomes received by many of those who need care; even with attendance allowance and other benefits, such an increase in living costs would force many of them to reduce the number of hours of support they receive. In addition, those requiring full-time live-in help, whose care costs a great deal more, would for the first time be forced to consider stopping being independent within their own home and going into residential care—they would be priced out of their own home. That has a consequence: it means that social services departments throughout the country should be made aware that there might be a sudden demand for residential care from people whose care requires great expertise.

When we hear, as we often do from Ministers, the language of self-congratulation, it begs the question whether they realise that the elderly, the frail and people with disabilities are all members of families; and that their relatives, whether they live close by or far away, will be desperately concerned about their plight. If the Government intend to pursue the policy, I warn the Minister that it will be seen as VAT on grannies. As the Minister knows, unless he is able to ward off the Treasury, such a policy will not be greeted with widespread acclaim.

Yesterday, the Minister said that the DTI was

"working closely with the Treasury"

to resolve the issue. As I interpret that answer, it means that DTI Ministers recognise that the policy that they created has developed a complication.

Mr. Johnson *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Browning: If the Minister does not see the problem, that concerns me greatly, given that, in the DTI, he is surrounded by former Treasury Ministers. We all know that, once part of the Treasury, something happens to hon. Members.

Mr. Johnson *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Browning: I am glad the Minister realises it. I am not sure what happens to people in the Treasury, but they are never again the same and they never again see things the same way. The Treasury initiation ceremony appears to ensure that, whatever portfolio Ministers take on after leaving the Treasury, they never quite dump the baggage of thinking that they must bring more revenue into the Treasury at every opportunity. However, in all fairness, they should not behave that way at the expense of Britain's pensioners and people with disabilities.

Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I give way to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Lorna Fitzsimons).

Lorna Fitzsimons *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Browning: Is there to be an auction? In that case, I give way to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane).

Mr. MacShane: Not an auction, but a choice. I am fascinated by the hon. Lady's comments on what happens to people who become Treasury Ministers—that they leave the Treasury totally deformed, transformed individuals. Does that explain what happened to the former right hon. Member now standing for election in Kensington and Chelsea? Was the right hon. Gentleman a human being before he became Chief Secretary to the Treasury and only became Michael Portillo when he left?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Lady realises the limits of the allusion she made and that she will go no further down that path. We are debating family friendly employment policies.

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you will be aware that there are as many elderly and frail people living in Kensington and Chelsea as there are in other parts of the country. Does the hon. Member for Rochdale now want to intervene?

Lorna Fitzsimons: No. I would have made the same point as my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane).

Mrs. Browning: Fine.

Yesterday, the Minister said that DTI Ministers were now to engage with the Treasury on the matter. He is new to the DTI, so I should tell him that that is not uncommon. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has introduced a range of employment policies that are ill thought through and create unfairness. Does anyone in his Department have any common sense? Does anyone think policies through and anticipate the problems? I genuinely believe that the Minister will make a valuable contribution to the DTI and I trust that he will bring a little common sense to bear on future policy making, so that policies are thought through properly before being put into the public domain.

Mr. Johnson: To answer the hon. Lady's point, there is no battle going on between the DTI and the Treasury. The DTI highlighted in May's consultation document the fact that changing the relationship so that the carer was clearly linked to the employment bureau and not to the person in need of care, which is a crucial concern of all the agencies, would have VAT implications. Having flagged up the problem, we are not about to fail to resolve

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it during the consultation period. Therefore, discussions are taking place between the DTI, the Treasury and the Department of Health to resolve the issue.

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to the Minister for that clarification. In the part of country that I represent, my natural political opponents are not members of the Labour party but Liberal Democrats, so I am familiar with the political tactic of creating a problem so as to be seen to solve it. It is a characteristic of Liberal Democrats—

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham) *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Browning: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me.

The Minister tells us that discussions are being held, but, in the meantime, many elderly people are extremely concerned. If the problem has now been recognised and Ministers understand the need to resolve it, I hope that they will get a move on and end the uncertainty that is making many people extremely anxious.

We have heard a great deal about policies for members of younger age groups and families with younger children. However, we are alert to the fact that such family friendly employment policies emerge from a Department whose Secretary of State has, as I said yesterday, quoting a report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, earned a reputation for having the respectable habit—that was a Freudian slip; I meant to say, a

"regrettable habit of issuing potentially misleading information".—[*Official Report*, 4 November 1999; Vol. 337, c. 461, 468.]

Mr. MacShane: Who is Freud?

Mrs. Browning: A former Liberal Member of Parliament.

I should like to draw the Minister's attention to some of the family friendly policies, especially those involving children, that have been promoted by Ministers. I refer to the Government's annual report, which was widely available in Tesco and elsewhere earlier this year. The report claims that the Government's policy is,

"The first ever national childcare strategy backed by an extra £470 million, to increase good quality, affordable childcare: 30,000 new childcare clubs and up to a million new childcare places."

We hear much about what the Government are supposed to have done about various sorts of child care places. Why is there an overall reduction in types of places that are available, especially for children who are under eight? Library figures show that the total number of places—in day nurseries, with registered child minders, in playgroups, nursery schools and classes—has decreased from 1,345,658 in 1998 to 1,298,410 this year. I shall put that in context. The total number of day care places for under-eights fell by 47,248. Of those, the number of places in nursery schools and classes fell from 368,358 to 366,910; the number of playgroup places fell from 370,700 to 336,600; and the number of places with registered child minders fell from 383,600 to 347,200.

The only increase was in the number of day nursery places. Although those figures have risen consistently since 1992, Conservative Members have often drawn attention to the fact that that increase is due to the fears of parents of rising fives and four-year-olds that, if they do not take up a place in a day nursery, they will be unable to get their child into a primary school of their choice. Therefore, apart from playgroup places, the figures that I have cited are for places that were on a rising scale since 1992—

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I shall give way when I have finished dealing with the figures, because it is difficult for people to grapple with them. Apart from playgroup places, figures rose consistently between 1992 and 1997. Despite the Government's pledge in their annual report, the number of places has dropped. Perhaps the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) or the Minister will explain why that pledge has not been honoured.

Mr. Pond: Can the hon. Lady tell the House what happened to the number of playgroups and other forms of pre-school child care under the previous Government's voucher system? Does she realise that the working families tax credit entitles people to help with their child care of up to £70 a week if they have one child and £100 a week if they have two or more children? If the Conservative party regained office, would it scrap that provision and take help away from working families?

Mrs. Browning: I shall comment on the working families tax credit shortly. However, when the Government create problems through their policy implementation, it is not for the Opposition to get a broom and clear up the mess.

Mr. Pond *rose—*

Lorna Fitzsimons *rose—*

Mrs. Browning: I am dealing with one intervention; I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment.

I was citing a lot of figures when the hon. Member for Gravesham intervened. Therefore, I reiterate that the figures between 1992 and 1997 show clearly that the total number of available places in all categories increased consistently. Given the Government's commitment in their annual report, why has there now been a drop in the number of child care places across the spectrum?

The Opposition believe in providing choice, and allowing parents to choose the type of facility that they want for their children. We believe in a range of provision so that parents can decide what is appropriate for them and their children. With the one exception that I mentioned, there has been a drop in all categories of provision. The Government put their policies in writing and make great play of how wonderful everything is. It is incumbent on the Minister, who is present to answer questions about Government policy, to explain the reasons for the drop in child care provision. I am anxious to know that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Dr. Kim Howells): We will attempt to check the figures with the Department for Education and Employment. Perhaps the drop is due to

falling rolls. The hon. Lady has great expertise in the matter and knows that the figures are volatile, and vary from year to year. However, we shall check them.

In the unlikely event of the Opposition ever gaining government, would they do away with the help of £70 for one child and that of £100 for two or more children? If so, what would that do for the availability of places?

Mrs. Browning: The Under-Secretary asks a question and then anticipates my response. As many Labour Members said when they were in opposition, we are undertaking a complete review of policies and, by the next election, we will issue a properly costed policy. The Government called for the debate; I presume that they do not want to debate the common-sense revolution.

Mr. Pond *rose—*

Mrs. Browning: I am dealing with the Under-Secretary's intervention; I shall come to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

When the Government make pledges and are in a position of power, they have a responsibility to defend or promote them. Their annual report—an important document that was available at every branch of Tesco throughout the country—shows that they made a pledge on places, which they have not been able to honour. Perhaps it is not their fault; the Under-Secretary suggested that the drop might be due to falling rolls. I do not believe that it is. The figures that I cited are from the Library and are readily available to him. He can check them with Departments and, if they are wrong, he can come back to me. Hon. Members on both sides treat with respect information that is commissioned by the House of Commons research department.

Lorna Fitzsimons *rose—*

Mrs. Browning: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Gravesham and then to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Pond: If the hon. Lady checks the record, she will read that several Conservative Members have said that they oppose the working families tax credit and would withdraw the help that it provides. If she is making a policy statement and claiming that the Conservative party supports the working families tax credit and the extra help with child care costs for working families with children, we will applaud that.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman tries to shore up those on his Front Bench, and I am sure they are grateful for that. When the Government present policies for debate in the House on which they intend to legislate, the Opposition raise objections. However, when a policy becomes an Act, we consider it in that light and develop our policies against that background. Those policies will be announced in the appropriate way by the Conservative Front-Bench team at the appropriate time. The hon. Gentleman is familiar with that process because his party employed it when in opposition.

Lorna Fitzsimons: At the beginning of her speech, the hon. Lady claimed that she was concerned about, and interested in, the provision that helped to enfranchise families at work and at home. Does she applaud the Government's attempt to make child care provision a Government responsibility? If so, why did the previous Government believe that it was the individual's responsibility? In constituencies such as mine, the voucher system decimated the number of available places. We have managed to increase the number of places only through the Government's pledge, and the commitment from local government under the previous Administration—which provided no direct money or policies.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Lady seems to claim that, while in opposition, the Labour party made an arrangement with local government whereby local government would increase the number of child care places when the Labour party gained office. Local education authorities around the country have tried to filter four-year-olds from playgroups and other providers so that parents will put their children in placements that LEAs and local schools provide.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I shall just finish the answer, then the hon. Lady can intervene if she wishes.

We have no prescriptive formula, but pressure is being put on parents. They have a choice of places, but if they do not put their child in placements provided by LEAs or local schools, they cannot be sure that that child will be able to attend the primary school that is attached to its nursery class. That is what has happened under this Government and that is why there has been a drop in provision. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point.

Lorna Fitzsimons *rose—*

Mrs. Browning: I will give way just once more, but I would then like to make some progress.

Lorna Fitzsimons: I appreciate the game spirit in which you are allowing Labour Members to intervene, but you asked for clarification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must remember that she is addressing the Chair.

Lorna Fitzsimons: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Lady sought clarification and I wanted to point out that, under the previous Government, child care was provided in my borough only because the local education authority thought that that was its responsibility. She also asked about current provision, but, by using smoke and mirrors, she is trying to confuse the public, if not those present in the Chamber. The Government have pledged—I hope that she backs that pledge—to provide every four-year-old with a nursery class place. That pledge has been welcomed in my constituency and we are moving well on the way to ensuring that every three-year-old receives that privilege, too. Does she not welcome that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are getting far too long. If the hon. Lady hopes to catch my eye later, I hope that she will not have run out of things to say.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Member for Rochdale legitimately states Labour party policy, but I hope that she

[Mrs. Browning]

has thought through its implications for playgroups. The Government have introduced a whole raft of policies, but they do not see the knock-on consequences for other people. That is one of their failings, and particularly in family friendly policy where they naturally want to capture the public's imagination and gratitude. They find that, by helping one group, they put another group at a disadvantage.

The Minister mentioned the new deal. In my seven years in Parliament, I have never seen so many glossy brochures or thick briefing notes on any subject as those on the new deal. They constantly drop on to my desk. One would imagine from that plethora of glossy brochures and announcements from Ministers that the new deal is doing a great deal to help people, particularly lone parents, to get back into work.

When the new deal was first announced, the Government counted the number of people who were invited to attend for interview. Up to August this year, 414,770 lone parents were invited for interview, but, of those, only 2 per cent.—9,350—went on to find jobs. Although I welcome it when anyone finds gainful employment under the scheme, it appears that the attention that the Government give to it and their claims of its success merit examination. Of those who joined the scheme, 68 per cent. have left it and failed to move into employment. That means that the Government's new deal for lone parents has not achieved what the glossy brochures claim. Instead, the vast majority of people involved in the scheme have moved, at taxpayers' expense, from welfare to welfare.

If the new deal for lone parents is to retain any shred of credibility, the Government will have to face up to the reality that it is not working on the scale that the amount of investment in it demands. The Minister should reconsider how it is implemented and how it helps people who may wish to return to employment. It is failing them at the moment.

When the Employment Relations Act 1999 was debated earlier this year, Conservative Members made it clear that we acknowledged that people with dependants—particularly those with dependent children—need, for various reasons, to take time off from time to time. We would prefer that to occur on a voluntary basis between employer and employee rather than on a statutory basis. That is not because we are against motherhood and apple pie but because, when the Government sought to offer out the goodies—for example, on parental leave and time off for a family crisis—they yet again failed to think the policy through.

On parental leave, I am sure that all Members will receive the representations that I have received, not in my Front-Bench capacity, but as a constituency MP. Several people and organisations are lobbying Members to ask the Government to make parental leave paid leave. For example, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children now has a letter writing campaign.

Why is parental leave a policy for the few, and not the many? Those organisations, including the NSPCC, are pointing out that the only people who can afford to take advantage of the Government's policy on parental leave are well-off and professional people who are on the sort of salaries that allow them to take their parental leave entitlement. The Minister will be aware that the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) marched to the door of No. 10 recently with a proposal to resolve yet another family friendly problem that the Government have created by introducing something which they thought was ostensibly popular, but that they failed to think through. That is not a question for Conservative Members, but we must be able to tell constituents why the Government introduced parental leave in the way that they did.

We have said openly that we believe that parental leave should be a matter for negotiation rather than statute, and that is the perfectly reasonable position that we have articulated. Why do the Government continue to introduce policies that result in Members receiving a postbag full of letters from respectable people, including members of the NSPCC, wanting to know why the Government's policies will not help the people that they are most concerned about?

Ms Ruth Kelly (Bolton, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: I will give way once more. However, I hope that the hon. Lady recognises that I have been very generous in giving way. I know that other Members want to speak and I want to give them the chance to do so.

Ms Kelly: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. She makes an interesting point. I believe that the way in which the policy has been introduced represents a great step forward for families, but will she take the opportunity to tell us whether the Conservative party would, if it were in government, pay for parental leave?

Mrs. Browning: I know that the hon. Lady is a new Member, but I remind her that the Government have created the mess, so they must clear it up. The Government should not introduce a half-baked policy and then look to the Opposition to provide the answers. They must get their little dustpans and brushes out and clean up their own mess.

Parental leave is yet another example of a policy that has been rushed through on the ground of dogma and wanting to do what everyone else in Europe does. However, when we consider what happens in the rest of Europe, we find that almost every other country in the European Union that has introduced parental leave has done so by offering benefits or pay when the leave is taken. It is all very well for the Government to introduce family friendly policies because they are popular and then to take the credit for them. However, they do not dip their hands into their pockets to pay for them. They dip their hands into the pockets of business and expect it to pick up the tab of administering their policies. Conservative Members are then left to find the solutions to the unfinished business that the Government have not thought through. That is no way to govern; it is not family friendly; and it is not very businesslike behaviour by those on the Government Front Bench who are supposed to be businesslike when they go about their duties. I trust that the Minister will convey that message to the Secretary of State.

The Government, motivated as they have been to sign up to ill-thought-out legislation, are impervious to the unjust distortions that their policies bring about. They are

more interested in the soundbite than in the effect that they have on people's lives and on the way that families work. The Government's family friendly policies leave business to pick up the tab, hit the elderly and fail to give time off to the less well-off. They are geared purely towards the better-off. That is Blair's Britain at the turn of the century. The Government have quite a gall bringing this subject to the House. Their policy is unfinished business, it is unfair and, the last thing that it is is friendly to families.

10.30 am

Ms Ruth Kelly (Bolton, West): Thank you for calling me so early in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Unfortunately, I shall not be able to stay to the end of the debate because I have to go to my constituency for an important and long-standing engagement.

I welcome the Under-Secretary for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Mr. Johnson) who opened the debate, to his well deserved Front-Bench post. I am pleased to be speaking in the first debate that the Government have held on family friendly employment. Drawing up policies to support family life will be a central challenge for the Government in the coming years. Those policies must support children financially, academically and emotionally, encourage parents to provide for their children and enable men and women to spend as much time as possible with their children, nurturing them. I recognise the importance of carers and caring responsibilities, highlighted by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), but I intend to focus on children.

Times have changed. The traditional family model, based on one breadwinner and a stay-at-home mother, is breaking down for financial and social reasons. Many families combine two earners, often two full-time workers. The Government have already recognised the changing pattern of family life. Their family policies so far have focused on making work pay and enabling families to have access to good quality and affordable child care. The Government's record is impressive. The working families tax credit tops up the income of low-wage households with children. The minimum wage sets a floor under earnings. The child care tax credit will subsidise child care places for the first two children on a sliding scale in low to middle-income families. Those policies and the record increase in child benefit will give mothers a choice on whether to go out to work or stay at home with their children.

The Government's proposals to make work pay have gone hand in hand with a strategy to encourage lone parents back to work, the primary motivation being to decrease dependency. Creating a working role model for children in such households will help to widen the horizons of the next generation.

It is time to move on. Policies to alleviate some of the pressures placed on relationships by long hours and heavy demands at the workplace for men and women must be central to our strategy, because those problems squeeze the number of hours that parents can spend at home with their children. The situation has been called a parenting deficit. The results can be severe, with insecure relationships and attachments between parents—particularly fathers—and their children. That has been increasingly associated with children's behavioural problems later in life, as well as with juvenile crime. Research shows that boys who have no contact with their fathers are more likely to be violent, get hurt or get into trouble, and do less well at school. It is important for boys to have a good relationship with their parents, even if they are separated. Any strategy for the family has to address those pressures on parents' time and encourage men as well as women to spend more time with their children.

Mr. Brady: I agree with much of what the hon. Lady says. Does she also believe that it is appropriate for the tax system to make it easier for married people to stay together and to promote marriage as a way of bringing up children?

Ms Kelly: If the hon. Gentleman is alluding to the married couples allowance, perhaps he agrees that it was an anomaly in the tax system that had nothing to do with children, because people without children could still receive it. That policy is not the way forward, although we have to underpin families with children through policies that help them financially. I have spelled out how the Government are taking that issue forward.

The Government's fairness at work legislation is the start of an important process, helping men and women to combine work and family life. I welcome the regulations that my hon. Friend set out. For the first time, men and women are entitled to take up to 13 weeks off work over the first five years of a child's life without facing the sack. In addition, parents will be able to take time off in family emergencies, such as when their child is sick or a child minder is unexpectedly unavailable in the morning. Those are important milestones for the family. Just 3 per cent. of employers have any provision for parents to take time off. The new arrangements are a step forward, giving parents an opportunity to balance work and family life.

I found the comments of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton astonishing. She cannot argue that either we should have voluntary arrangements—or no arrangements—for parental leave or that parental leave should be paid. Surely if she believes in balancing work and family life, she should agree that the Government's policies are a step forward. I think that the Government should be going further, but the hon. Lady's comments struck me as absurd and I was astonished to hear them.

Who is likely to benefit from the regulations that have been introduced? Unpaid leave will be useful to workers in some contexts. For example, those with a child facing a crisis point may be forced to stay at home for a short period. They are likely to be lone mothers or mothers with working partners who are low paid and receive no annual leave beyond the statutory minimum. The right to return to work at the same rate of pay will give them job security during that time. In addition, a few wealthier working mothers with working partners who are able to save or whose income is genuinely marginal to the family income will also benefit from the opportunity to take spells of unpaid parental leave. However, that is only a small group of women.

I was interested to hear my hon. Friend the Minister comment on the importance of fathers increasingly wanting to play a role in bringing up their children. However, fathers are unlikely to take any unpaid leave. A TUC survey shows that, among 130,000 employees at major financial institutions in the UK that currently offer

[Ms Kelly]

unpaid leave, over the past five years only 42 men have chosen to take it up. The Department of Trade and Industry has recognised that, pointing to the fact that 35 per cent. of women but only 2 per cent. of men are likely to take unpaid leave as the framework stands. The result will be that a whole tier of low and middle-income Britain, particularly fathers, will be unable or unwilling to benefit from unpaid leave.

I congratulate the Government on their decision to allow low-income parents to claim benefits during their periods of leave, something that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced in his speech to the Labour party conference. The Government estimate that about 1,000 people a year will take advantage of that new provision.

Parental leave from work has far greater potential to address many aspects of the Government's agenda for the family. By promoting responsible parenthood, it could enable mothers and fathers to share more equally in bringing up children and create greater opportunities for mothers to work if they wish, secure in the knowledge that they will be able to take time at home with the children if they are needed. It could also contribute to happier, more stable families with better-adjusted children. However, for those goals to be met, parental leave would need to be paid at a high enough rate for men in the work force not to feel under too great a financial strain if they take it. As the Social Security Committee report on parental leave, which was published this week, says:

"It is clear to us that if parental leave is unpaid take-up among fathers will particularly low."

Any attempt to meet those goals rules out limiting payments to the poorest families, such as those in receipt of the working families tax credit, which will be introduced in the autumn. According to the Treasury, about 1.4 million families are likely to receive the new tax credit, but almost half of them are single parents, mainly mothers. A low-income payment might help those children, but it will do much less to promote stable relationships or bonding between fathers and children, which is also important.

A suggestion that I have made, which has the advantage of simplicity, is to pay parents taking leave a flat rate of about £100 a week. The idea of flat-rate payments has now been backed by the Social Security Committee in its report. On reasonable assumptions—15 per cent. of men and 50 per cent. of women taking their full 13-week entitlement—the Treasury has estimated that the total cost of providing such a flat-rate payment at that level would be £285 million a year. That might be a building block for a more generous entitlement in future; or, if finances were really strained, the payments could be limited to the first eight weeks.

If the payment were set at around that level, or perhaps in line with the minimum wage, lower-paid workers could spend time with their children with little financial penalty, while wealthier couples could save and top up their income so they would not be financially penalised too greatly by taking parental leave. Employers could enter into arrangements with their employees to top up the flat-rate payment.

As well as payment for parental leave, flexibility is important. I welcome the Government's suggestion that there might be work force or collective agreements on how to implement the parental leave directive, provided that they meet the basic requirements. The Government's consultation paper suggests that such agreements might allow parents to take parental leave by working a shorter working week for a number of weeks.

Such flexibility seems to be the ideal, and the most likely to help employees and employers. Therefore, I was slightly disappointed to find that the Government's model contract, which will operate where there is no union and no collective agreements, and where people are probably on lower incomes—they may be agency and temporary workers—will require workers to take parental leave in blocks of at least a week, with at least four weeks notice. I do not believe that to be ideal, as parents in such employment are likely to find it extremely difficult to meet those requirements and take full advantage of the leave.

I make two further pleas to the Government. The first is to consider extending the upper age limit from five, as parents need to take time off to look after their children even after they have started school. As the scheme limits the total time to three months, I doubt whether employers will find it too much of a burden to allow that leave to be spread over a longer period.

My second plea is to forgo the requirement that parental leave cannot be taken until an employee has worked for a specific employer for at least a year. Part of the purpose of introducing parental leave is to encourage people back into the work force, especially lone parents who might otherwise not be attracted to the idea of taking a job. I believe that the latter will be put off by the fact that, in those initial weeks and months, they will be unable to take advantage of their parental leave. In those circumstances, they may not accept a job offer.

However, I acknowledge that the Government's family friendly proposals are a huge leap forward for the family and for children. I congratulate them on what they have done so far.

10.43 am

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly). She gave compelling evidence to the Select Committee on Social Security, and I am grateful to her for adverting to the fact that the Committee's ninth report, on parental leave, was published earlier in the week.

I congratulate the Minister for Competitiveness on the way in which he introduced the debate. The subject is very important, and it is a very important time to discuss it. He was chancing his arm slightly by using clever wordplay on "creche" and "crash". As he is the hon. Member for Hull, West and Hessle, he had better be careful not to get lumbered with the soubriquet of "Minister for hassle". In any case, he must have got the joke from his private office, because these days only civil servants can afford to run Range Rovers. However, I enjoyed his speech.

I am an Opposition Member—although, as Chairman of a Select Committee, I am above all the party political dialogue—but I commend the Government on what they have done on family friendly employment policies. In two years, they have made a great deal of progress, at least in erecting signposts showing the direction that we would all like to take. It is not always as easy to deliver on

commitments as it is to publish documents, but the Government have taken a positive stance on a range of policies.

The Government must understand that the subject has interdepartmental aspects. The Education Minister who is sitting next to the Minister for Competitiveness is welcome—

Dr. Howells: I am from the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Kirkwood: Times change! The hon. Gentleman has made such an impact that I thought he was still an Education Minister. I beg his pardon; I withdraw that allegation.

The point remains valid that, if the implementation of family friendly policies is to be consistent and coherent, it must be done on a cross-departmental basis. It is not simply a social security matter, or an education matter, or a health matter; all the other Departments are affected. If these policies are to succeed, the Minister for Competitiveness must accept his responsibility to co-ordinate that work. I hope that he does.

I am especially keen for the Government's welfare-to-work plans to succeed. If they do, they will put more people into work, which is right and proper; but, by definition, they will increase the pressures on people in reconciling the demands of family life and the workplace. I believe that the Government have moved in the right direction and I wish them well. They still have a long way to go, and there are still big gaps in what they have proposed today.

I have a great deal of time for the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), but I am sorry that she came to the debate straight from Conservative central office. If she had left her brief behind and used her experience and her passion for these subjects, in which she is genuinely interested, we would have had a better debate. However, I do not want to provoke her into attacking me, because I am too sensitive for that type of thing.

When we debate social policies, we should remember an important point. I am sure that, like me, other hon. Members were reminded of that point when reading reports in *The Independent* and *The Guardian* on 25 October. They said that the market research group CACI had found huge variations in economic circumstances between the north and the south. I need not tell the Minister or the hon. Member for Bolton, West that there are huge economic and social differences between different parts of the country; and that is true intra-regionally as well. Some postcode areas within regions have much more difficult circumstances than other parts of the country.

Ministers are right to deploy legislation based on the whole United Kingdom—it would be strange if it were otherwise. However, I would argue for positive discrimination in some of the ways that policies are implemented. We should focus on some of our most deprived peripheral estate-type areas. That is true of family friendly policies, too. It would be very positive if that were reflected in the implementation and configuration of some of the plans that the Government are making, and if pilots were targeted on some of those deprived, hard-bitten, downtrodden parts of the country. Otherwise, inequality and the income divide will become worse, which is in no one's interests.

We are dealing with a long-term problem. In the single generation from my father's day to my son's day, the process of family breakdown has accelerated. Marriages have fallen by half; divorces have tripled; children born out of wedlock have quadrupled; and 70 per cent. of young couples now co-habit before marriage. In a generation, that is a fantastic revolution in the way that ordinary people live. I sometimes wonder whether policy making is keeping up with that revolution. We risk being left behind. The Government are doing a great deal to tackle that, but there is an awful lot more to do.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Should Government policies follow social trends or seek to influence them?

Mr. Kirkwood: Discuss. The hon. Gentleman, a distinguished colleague on the Social Security Committee, pursues that point with great dedication.

Government should remain neutral in social relationships behind the family front door and recognise that people have practical problems to confront. The Lord Chancellor's Department is doing some research. Nottingham school of sociology is examining the ways in which family breakdown has arisen and whether people are now committed to personal development more than to the family.

Government should be agnostic about that and offer practical proposals that help people to reconcile the differences. It is a mistake to contrive taxation and other policies to keep families together. Conservatives say that we are not doing enough to support marriage. I remember that, in Nigel Lawson's day, it paid people enormous dividends financially to be single and stay together, because of double mortgage provision and so on. Conservatives cannot claim to have been champions of the family friendly approach when they were in government. Governments should try to provide the best practical support.

I was dismayed and astonished to find in the Child Support Agency's annual report, which was published in the past few days, that there are 52,000 absent mothers, who have left their children behind and gone to develop other families. That is just the tip of the iceberg—the women whom is the CSA is pursuing for maintenance. There is a real problem out there and we must grapple with it. Someone told me the other day that one in five members of Gingerbread are now men. Such figures are difficult to comprehend and reflect a situation that requires our urgent attention.

I shall make two or three suggestions about how we should make progress. I hope that the Minister will have a chance to study the Royal College of Nursing's "Making Time" campaign. For many years, I have been a member of the RCN parliamentary panel. I was struck by a survey which reveals that one in five nurses leave their jobs because of inflexible employer practices. The Government have some influence in the public sector and the national health service. If I were the Minister—the Minister for Health, rather than a DTI Minister—I would be interested in finding out more about the survey results. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased to see that the Minister for Competitiveness has a copy in his inside pocket.

[Mr. Kirkwood]

Two of the key findings are worth sharing with the House. Evidence of the lack of employee friendly policies comes from the finding that almost half the respondents—47 per cent.—believed that family life had been affected, with 30 per cent. of the nurses in the sample stating that their relationship with their children had suffered. An even more worrying finding was that almost two fifths—39 per cent.—of nurses in the sample felt that, on some occasions, they had not been able to give their best to patients because of outside pressures. That is worrying. If the DTI can work with the NHS, the trusts and the unions to discuss the findings, that would be extremely helpful.

The national child care strategy is positive, but it has three gaps, which the Government should consider carefully. First, I understand that almost two thirds of mothers return to work at the end of their statutory maternity leave. I welcome the Government's steps to rationalise maternity leave, but if two thirds of working mothers go back to work after maternity leave, and the child care strategy begins to take effect only when the child reaches the age of three, there is a huge potential gap in the child care provided for the under-threes. That is reflected in nursery provision. We need more playgroups and better provision.

Secondly, I am disappointed that students cannot take advantage of the child care tax credit. The Social Security Committee has been considering tax credits, and we warmly welcomed the massive steps forward that the Government have taken. However, many colleges do not provide nearly enough creche facilities—that is a separate point—so I hope that the Government will find some way to allow student couples with young families to take advantage of the tax credit provision.

Thirdly, the national child care strategy does not deal appropriately with shift working. Only about 10 per cent. of working families adopt a normal nine-to-five 40-hour-a-week work pattern. Part-time work and shift working are patterns that we ignore at our peril. Much more could be done.

We need more trained child care staff, better public transport so that people can take the children to school and get to work, and better opening times. I know that Government consultation documents have focused on public sector opening hours. The CSA offices, for example, are now accessible by telephone until later in the evening. That is valuable.

I commend the Social Security Committee's ninth report, on parental leave. I was initially a sceptic. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) persuaded the Committee that the subject was important, and I thought that we could deal with it in a day and produce a short report. However, once we began, we could have spent at least six months on the subject. The evidence, including that given by the hon. Member for Bolton, West, was compelling and of high quality. I am a convert, or even a zealot on the positive impact of parental leave.

I warmly welcome the fact that the Government have decided to make benefits available to a wider range of couples. The case for payment is compelling, but the Committee was tentative about the matter. The hon. Member for Bolton, West was right to say that we opted for a flat-rate system of payment. We understand the difficulties and the case against that; some businesses, especially small businesses, are nervous.

To try to reflect that, we suggested for a specified time a flat-rate payment, however it is set. The Government could discuss with the Treasury what could be afforded, and the system could be monitored. The experience in America shows that to be a positive approach. There, a commission was set up, a two-year study carried out, and the matter re-examined and taken forward.

Mr. Alan Johnson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will study carefully the points that he makes, and we applaud his constructive approach.

Mr. Kirkwood: That means that, even if there is no immediate payment, after the system has been monitored for long enough, the Government might reconsider the possibility of payment. Some of us might settle for that. Unless we do something, fathers and low-income groups will not be able to take advantage of the benefit.

According to evidence that we received, 2 per cent. of fathers and 35 per cent. of mothers may be able to take up unpaid parental leave. That is welcome as a step forward. We cannot crack the problem and make a serious impact until the Government grasp the nettle. The Treasury does not have blank cheques to issue, and £200 million is a substantial sum of public expenditure. If we are serious about promoting family friendly policies, I can think of no better way of spending £200 million than putting some level of payment into parental leave.

10.59 am

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me early in the debate. I begin by declaring an interest as a trustee of the Daycare Trust.

I join others in welcoming the Minister for Competitiveness to the debate. His successful career as a trade union leader will be important in informing the debate in the Department of Trade and Industry . May I add comments in respect of my not-so-distinguished career as a business man?

I commend the Government policies that are in place, which were referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly), such as the working families tax credit. Work has been done on child benefit and child care help, the maternity leave extension, the working hours directive and the parental leave proposals, which were laid before the House yesterday. I commend to the House all those proposals, which I believe will do a great deal to enhance the work-life balance that we all so much require. I also support my hon. Friend in respect of the need to move further towards payment for core parental leave, which is referred to in those proposals.

As other Members have said, it is extremely important to ensure that parental leave is not available simply for wealthier people who are, perhaps, in the higher echelons of companies—those who have the industry muscle to ensure that they can take advantage of unpaid parental leave. I ask the Government to look for a way of making core parental leave paid and suggest that we could take as a starting point the qualifying basis that is used for maternity leave payments.

Mr. Brady: For clarification, does the hon. Gentleman, unlike the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly),

want employers to pay an element of the cost of parental leave? I think she suggested that the cost should be borne by the state.

Mr. Colman: As core maternity leave payments are made by the state, so core parental leave payments should also be made by the state.

I was developing the argument that the work-home balance is still a pipe dream. That was the heading for a press release published on 21 October by the Institute of Management, which brought us up to date on its five-year programme examining the quality of working life which started in 1997 and will run through to 2002. The latest figures, which were published two weeks ago, state that only 15 per cent. of executives think that the organisations for which they work make any attempt to achieve that work-life balance, and 81 per cent. of the people interviewed work for more than 40 hours a week. That figure was the same in 1997. Of those polled, 32 per cent. work more than 50 hours and 58 per cent. believe that the employer expects long hours. I would like to attract support from both sides of the House for condemning that approach in industry.

Of those polled, 28 per cent. said that the companies for which they work already have parental leave schemes in place and 15 per cent. expect their companies to introduce such schemes this year. That is an interesting change, but only 3 per cent. receive child care support from their company. That picks up the intervention made by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) about the role of employers in encouraging the work-life balance and the provision of help.

I am concerned to ensure that companies that are interested in helping on child care and parental leave are able to do so. Barry Gibson is the group chief executive of the Littlewoods organisation, which has led the way on family friendly employment policies. In an article, he says:

"In its own search for successful family-friendly strategies, the Government should not simply turn to the stick of legislation. Instead it should offer the carrot of incentives to encourage businesses to respond positively. These could include tax relief for employers who fund caring provision for their employees; tax relief for employees who fund their own childcare; or making employees exempt from tax where employers fund private childcare places."

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor might explore those matters in the green Budget next Tuesday. It is slightly absurd that luncheon vouchers retain tax-free eligibility when parental leave vouchers do not have the same status—an issue that my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) has explored in recent days. The Minister may say in his winding-up speech whether there is a way forward on encouraging employers who wish to do so to offer parental leave vouchers.

It has been said that the Government's policies are okay for large employers, but a problem for small and medium-sized enterprises. There is great difficulty in this area because little research has been done. However, excellent work is being carried out by Kingston university and, if I may crave the indulgence of the House, I shall quote from recent research, as yet unpublished, by Juliet Colman on flexible employment policies for SMEs in south-west London. Her work clearly shows that family friendly policies in SMEs pay for the shareholders and for the management. Furthermore, they make the work force considerably more motivated and committed to the goals of the SME, and the empowering of SME employees is significant when such policies are implemented.

That view was strongly expressed by my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce in work that she did for the Institute for Public Policy Research in 1991 and very much borne out by the research of Juliet Colman. If employees are able to choose when they work within a flexi-time arrangement, they feel much more committed and are empowered to take charge of their lives. She found the small but significant example of a father being able to leave work each day at 4 o'clock during term time to collect his children from school and take them to the child minder. He returned to work at 4.30 and simply added the half hour on to the working day.

That measure sounds extremely simple, but how many businesses would allow their staff to leave for half an hour if they wanted to do so? It is important to encourage such initiatives, and I also agree with the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who spoke for the official Opposition, about ensuring that family friendly policies cover child care and care of the elderly. That was certainly borne out by the research. Work needs to fit into people's lives, not the other way round.

The research also showed that primary SMEs found it much easier to work on family friendly policy than secondary SMEs, which are defined as those working with the public 24 hours a day. We need to explore how we can ensure that they receive particular help. As other hon. Members have said, there has been a huge increase in part-time working, which has obviously been advantageous to employers. However, the research clearly shows that it has been advantageous to employees.

I was pleased to hear the Minister say that a best practice guide would be produced in the next few weeks. The research also reveals that very different approaches are being taken, and that companies in south-west London lack knowledge about what is going on and what different companies do. The more knowledge that there is about what can be done and the success that can come from that, the better for all of us.

So far, I have spoken as a business man: from my business experience, I have found that family friendly policies pay off on all sides of the business community. However, I am also a father of eight and I spent time as a single parent, so I very much relate to the 52,000 single fathers who bring up families on their own. One in five of the Gingerbread group to which I belonged was a single father. It is important to register the fact that fathers, as well as mothers, need to be empowered by family friendly policies.

Part of the reason for my two failed marriages must be the long hours that I worked in business—often 90 or 100 hours a week. As hon. Members move to Parliament from their previous occupations, it is important to reflect on, and use, our experience, and to do what we can to ensure that the practices that did not work are prevented in the future. It is extremely important that the working time directive is implemented, albeit flexibly, and that parental leave is available to all to ensure that fathers, mothers and employees benefit from a much more family friendly society.

11.12 am

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): We must recognise the needs of people who care for the young, as well as for the elderly. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) for raising the question of both family carers and paid carers of frail, elderly or handicapped people.

The debate so far has been generally useful. I commend to hon. Members who have not yet read it the Social Security Committee's report, as they will be interested in the many submissions that were made to it. I shall not rehearse all the arguments because the Select Committee Chairman did that ably. However, I shall follow on from what the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) said—we understand why she had to leave. We must take the individual and the family life cycle into account.

We accumulate all our material assets during our working life, although we may have other needs when we are dependent or retired. The question is, how best to reconcile needs and resources at different stages of the life cycle. It is perfectly reasonable to say that, when we die, society should be able, through the taxpayer, to give £1,000 or £2,000 towards the various costs. When considered over a lifetime of work, that should not be too difficult.

It is also reasonable to say that, when a child is born, its citizenship should be recognised by a £500 or £1,000 grant. I shall not try to resolve the detail today, but the question arises of how much of that £500 or £1,000 should be available for parental leave. Should it be a flat-rate or earnings-related grant; how much should be available to the parents; and should the Government, the taxpayer or Parliament decide how it should be divided?

One of the problems with giving people certain benefits, such as free public transport for the elderly, is that those who do not want to use public transport, but prefer to drive, lose out. The more one goes into the detail, the more one finds that people are losing out unnecessarily.

A baby should either be given a lump sum when it is born, or a guarantee during the first six months of a substantial recognition of the fact that it has joined society and will eventually pay tax. After all, the tax that that citizen will pay will allow the same to happen to new babies after him, and pensioners ahead of him. Hopefully, he will get a reasonable deal when society needs to carry some of the burden that he would otherwise have to carry for himself. There should be a recognition that, over the next five or 10 years, the citizen is in transition.

I wish to reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Tiverton about charging VAT to those who have to pay for their own care. I am not sure that Treasury Ministers have in the front of their minds the fact that, ultimately, all tax is paid by individuals—businesses do not really pay tax. Shareholders, employees and customers pay tax, but businesses do not tend to have to carry that burden. People who organise or pay for their own home help, whether or not they are on income support, or receive incapacity benefit or attendance allowance, must pay VAT if it is added to the charges.

We can discuss who the employer is, who is responsible for health and safety and other such matters, but I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), in winding up the debate, will declare that, whatever solution the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury come up with, those frail, elderly, retired or disabled individuals will not have to pay an extra 17.5 per cent. on the personal care that they receive. That is the bottom line—it is the Bottomley line—and it should be the Government line. I urge the Minister to make that declaration.

I have connections with somebody who helps to organise care for people at home, but I have not had a briefing on this matter. I am simply expressing my constituents' concerns. My constituency has the highest proportion of retired people in the country—more than 1,000 of a doctor's 12,000 patients may be over 85—so this is an extremely important issue.

I shall not be able to stay to hear the winding-up speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who I am glad will respond, because I must discuss with my health authority the health needs of people over the age of 85. The family of an 89-year-old widow in my constituency is concerned that she will have to wait 12 months for a hearing assessment and seven months after that—a total of 19 months—before she has the chance of getting an NHS hearing aid.

Dr. Howells: I know that the hon. Gentleman has to leave the debate early and I just wanted to tell him that I have heard the message loud and clear. We are very much aware of the fear and concerns that can be generated by those imponderables. We shall try to clarify the matter and I hope that the Opposition will play their part in ensuring that this matter does not become a prairie fire, but that we deal with it constructively.

Mr. Bottomley: I am grateful to the Minister. His intervention shows a modification in the Government's response, because the last letter that I received from Ministers on this subject totally missed the point. I have made the point clearly in my representations and I am glad that the Minister has responded in that way.

The subject of parental leave gives rise to a question about the law. The law can make some actions into an offence—it says that one must take some particular form of action, otherwise one is committing an offence, civil or criminal. The law can give people rights, although it does not necessarily mean that they will take them up, and provide a system of dispute resolution. Ever since I ran a small business putting neon lights outside theatres and cinemas in the west end in the 1970s, employing 25 people, I have feared that, if burdens were placed on my business, they might cause me to go out of business.

When politicians consider what employers should do, we must be mindful that, if we say what they must do, that normally requires subscribing to a human resources publication. Someone running a small business—perhaps a shop with two or three part-time employees—may have to spend a day-and-a-half a week reading the new regulations. For the one in five who, at some stage in their life, run a small business, such a burden becomes impracticable. Indeed, they are likely to make mistakes because they do not know how the secondary legislation has been passed through Parliament or what the latest guidance is. I am not arguing for lower standards of health and safety or employment practice, but I sometimes worry that, in our enthusiasm for what large employers could do relatively easily, we forget that we are imposing that on small employers as well.

We must also realise that, every time we preserve employment rights, we say to temporary employees that they cannot have that temporary job on a permanent basis. I am not arguing against the preservation of re-employment or parental leave, but we must be aware that someone who replaces an employee who is temporarily away cannot have that job permanently. That is a kind of exploitation, as it reduces people's choice.

I am glad that we are having this debate on family friendly policies. I initiated the first one in 1978 under a previous Labour Government, and the second one in the 1981-82 Session under the Tory Government. I hope that we shall return to this subject and its different aspects, informed by reports such as that of the Select Committee on Social Security.

If we, in the government process, believe that something is a good idea, let us prove it in what we ourselves do. When I was a Minister at the then Department of Employment, I asked why it did not have more part-time workers, especially people with family responsibilities. I was told that Ministers would require half the Department to be available for emergency debates. That is rubbish. Many more civil service jobs should be part time, and not just as a job share.

We should ask why people employed in the civil service or by other mayor employers do not take up their rights. Even in Scandinavian countries, many people do not take up their paternal leave options—unless things have changed since I last looked at the figures. Sometimes it is because of culture and sometimes it is the law, but if we want to reconcile family responsibilities with work and work opportunities, we should take the life cycle into account. We should not be mean with people who would value help, but we should expect people to play fair by paying their tax and national insurance contributions when they are able to do so.

I was once asked to resign as a Parliamentary Private Secretary because I backed Margaret Thatcher's policy on the importance of child benefit. Sometimes, even people in the Government do not understand what they are trying to achieve—the Chief Whip in my day did not. We have child benefit and the basic child allowance. It is better to have a cash allowance than a tax allowance, and it is should be paid to the mother, weekly if necessary.

11.22 am

Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): I concur with many of the comments made by the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley). I love debates in which people are honest about the problems. Some people, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), have lived through them, and some of us have experienced what our parents went through. The life cycle must be at the heart of the debate. We are debating this matter in Parliament, but my constituents become exasperated because they do not think that this place is relevant to their lives. We have for years disregarded our responsibility to make it work for them.

The economy and business do not work if they do not relate to people's lives. When all the cards are in one person's favour, it tips the balance. That is what has happened in the past 15 years. I welcome the Government's balanced approach, in genuine partnership with all the interested parties, including some who have not been welcome at the top table for some time. As the hon. Member for Worthing, West said, we have a responsibility to take account of the life cycle in our policies, and to get the investment to back them up.

We pay the cost. It is a hard economic cost for business, and a hard economic and social cost for our communities, the Treasury and the taxpayers. The debate is about putting social, employment and hard economic policy in the same prism. We allowed zero-hour contracts and exploitation in employment, and then we wondered why mum and dad were not at home, and did not know that Johnny was playing truant and vandalising local businesses. We then had to spend a lot of money protecting business and getting rid of the vandalism. We never made that social equation. It is right that we are now putting that slap bang at the heart of Government policy.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) questioned the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who has had to make these choices herself. The hon. Lady's comment that our proposals were unfair was astounding. She said that our policies have been rushed through on the grounds of dogma. Our policies have not been rushed through. Communities have paid the price for policies that have been out of balance and on the wrong side of the equation. The Exchequer and retailers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Putney, with his experience of the retail industry, will know, have paid the hard economic cost of not putting family and work together in the same prism.

The hon. Lady seemed to be more interested in playgroups as a business. For the first time ever, the Government have pledged to provide places for four-year-olds in primary classes. I hope that that will be extended by the next election and apply to three-year-olds as well. That would make a remarkable difference not only to the nurture and education of those children, but to families and their need for child care while they are at work.

In my constituency, we have received a Government grant so that 83.6 per cent. of three-year-olds in my borough are already enjoying that wonderful provision. People are beating at my door asking why they cannot get that financial help. I hope that they will all receive it eventually. I therefore found the hon. Lady's comments surprising, given the respect that most people have for her.

It is no wonder that boys have difficulty reading when employers say that their employees must work the hours that they are told to or they do not work at all, with the consequence that boys never read with their fathers. What I find disturbing about the official Opposition, especially given their penchant for choice, is that they criticise the Government's policies, such as the new deal, the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit, and say that they are forcing mothers to work.

I am not an economist or a good bead counter, but I believe that, if we strengthen the family by ensuring that people on the lowest rung of the pay scale have a greater basic income through the minimum wage, working families tax credit, child care allowance and the increased child benefit, fathers will be able to choose not to work overtime, rather than being forced to work more than 48 hours a week to make ends meet. The work ethic can work through increased pay, so that people do not have to rely on benefit. Fathers can now go home and read with their children and help them with their homework before they go to bed. They can choose to do that and not suffer

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economically. My parents had to make the stark choice of whether to stay home and nurture the children or go out to work. In my constituency, there are families who have three generations with no work experience.

The changes that the Government have introduced in the past two and a half years are just coming on stream: the working families tax credit, the child care tax credit, the benefit for the lower paid and the recognition of unpaid work. We should shout about those changes from the treetops—even some hon. Members do not know about them, let alone people outside. We are changing the working environment.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Putney said, we must make hard business and economic choices. The Equal Opportunities Commission undertook pioneering work on this subject. It has played a large part in putting this issue on the agenda. It surveyed micro-businesses, with under 10 employees, and medium-sized businesses. It found that, contrary to the national perception that small businesses cannot afford family friendly policies, they were pioneering flexible working practices. The majority of small businesses, especially highly skilled businesses in e-commerce, must work flexibly. If a dedicated specialist has a family crisis, it is not a good idea to be inflexible and say, "Here are your cards", having invested in that person and with a huge contract involved. That person will be vital to the firm's survival.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Lady is right: small businesses have a superb record in terms of flexible working practices. I feel, however, that she is making the case against rather than for legislation. If it is to the commercial advantage of small businesses to employ such practices, why legislate and cause additional problems?

Lorna Fitzsimons: The hon. Gentleman's point is based on the good practice employed by a few. In reality, however, many small businesses still believe the myth that good practice is unaffordable. We as parliamentarians have a moral obligation to act. For not just decades but generations, people have been given different rights depending on where they are in the work force—in economic terms, in terms of skills and, in some cases, geographically. Their rights may depend on the size of the business that employs them. We are saying that people should have equal rights regardless of where they are or who employs them. We believe that Government have a moral obligation to set standards, and that is what we are doing, because, as I said earlier, ultimately it is we who pay the price.

Last year, the Ministers for Women undertook a "listening to women" exercise. Over 12 regions, 300,000 women named flexibility and a suitable balance between work and home as a priority that should be addressed by Government. It is clear that this view is not a mere aberration on our part, or based solely on our constituency experience; consultation has established that women are setting their own agenda.

As I have said, there is a strong case for businesses to adopt flexible practices. My hon. Friend the Member for Putney mentioned research into the hard economic benefits conferred by such practices. He particularly mentioned Juliet Colman's research, as yet unpublished. I hope that we shall have a chance to see those findings at some point. Surely it is obvious that a happy worker will be less likely to pretend to be ill when it is actually an elderly mother or a child who is ill, and will be more likely to co-operate with requests that an employer may make at certain times, such as a request for the employee to work unusual hours in order to fulfil a contract.

This week, I joined in the celebrations marking the first birthday of TBA Ballistics, a firm in my constituency 90 per cent. of whose employees—there are fewer than 20—are women. The chief executive told me that they sometimes had to work unsocial hours in order to fulfil contracts, but that, when one of the women had to pick up her son, the boss went with her in his car. I congratulate such organisations, which have experienced phenomenal growth in the past 12 months thanks to their flexible practices. Their commitment has repaid them tenfold in terms of hard economic benefit: employees will show commitment if their employers do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West echoed the view of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security in regard to pay. I think that that view is now well established, but let me add my support for the idea of a flat rate. I also feel that we caused disappointment when we set the age limit at five rather than eight. Where is the economic sense in that, especially at a time when we are encouraging parents to adopt older children?

Eligibility is another important issue. I fear that we have made a faux pas in specifying those born or adopted after 15 December; many children will benefit while their brothers and sisters will not, and people working in the same business as those whose families will benefit will also be excluded. I know that we are awaiting legal advice but, in the meantime, I urge Ministers to be as flexible as possible. Good government is about feeling able to reconsider, and to reconsider wisely. I think that we have been too inflexible.

Following consultation, it decided that women on maternity leave should be [illegible] to return to work in a part-time capacity. Maternity is unpredictable; the birth may have been difficult, or the child may have problems. I also think that women should be able to return to work initially in a part-time capacity. If my understanding of the regulations is correct, that has been ruled out.

The Chairman of the Social Security Committee mentioned child care problems experienced by those in higher and further education. Because further education is primarily adult education, those involved have proved to be good at working out ways in which to deal with child care, but the same funds are not provided for higher education, at a time when we are trying to increase the flow from further to higher education—often higher education in a further education setting. Hopwood Hall in my constituency has developed imaginative ways of funding good further education provision—it could be better, but it is good—but those wishing to proceed to higher education cannot do so, because the Higher Education Funding Council does not provide the same funds for child care.

The Small Business Service should concentrate on making family friendly legislation work. As the hon. Member for Worthing, West said, we should lead by example. The Select Committee on Administration carried out a survey on child care among the 6,000 employees

of this place, and then had the wisdom, according to its Chairman—a woman—to say that 256 people wanted to use on-site facilities, and that that was too small a percentage of 6,000 to suggest that there was any real demand. Has she ever been to a nursery or a day care centre?

If the Treasury and many other Whitehall Departments can buy into imaginative child care packages for civil servants in this area—in central London—why do we not enfranchise staff of the Palace of Westminster? I am thinking, for instance, of our catering and Library staff. We treat them as second-class citizens, but they do exactly the same job as civil servants; it is just that they are employed by the Serjeant-at-Arms rather than by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Why should they have to suffer because of that? We should stop being hypocritical, and asking others to do what we do not do ourselves. I hope that the House of Commons Commissioners are listening.

Many of the problems experienced by businesses, including small businesses, would not arise if the right approach were taken to start-up grants—if an imaginative banker looking at the balance sheets took the need for family friendly, flexible working patterns into account, thus enabling businesses to start in a healthy state. Problems are often caused not by the fact that a business person does not care, but by the fact that that person's hands are tied because of the way in which the budget was structured in the first place, which causes cash flow difficulties. We should work with the banking system to ensure that, from this day onwards, no business is hamstrung because the wrong advice was given, and the budget was not structured in a way that promoted what I consider to be the crusade of the millennium. If we get this right, everyone will be able to play a full role in society and at work, and we shall have a genuinely knowledge-based economy. People will be able to go home and nurture their children; there will be less crime and vandalism, and more people will have a chance to exercise the work ethic, all the year round.

11.39 am

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Lorna Fitzsimons). During the brief absence from the Chamber of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), she referred to my hon. Friend's comments, particularly those about child care provision and the fate of playgroups in the current climate. The hon. Lady has to bear it in mind that, although the Government have for the first time guaranteed a child care place for every four-year-old, whatever the argument we may have about the best mechanism for delivering that, the previous Government for the first time guaranteed child care funding for every four-year-old.

Lorna Fitzsimons: By voucher.

Mr. Brady: By voucher. As I have said, the hon. Lady and I may have differences about the preferable way of delivering that facility to parents, but the key difference between Conservative and Labour Members is who should have choice in provision. I am sure that she would happily accept that there is a key difference; she would say that that is a good thing. She believes in a more planned approach and that provision is the responsibility of Government and local government—municipal authorities should provide. I suspect that most Conservative Members would rather see more diverse provision, frequently involving the private sector, which gives the parent greater choice in the type of available child care facility.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the child care tax credit would have an uncertain future if the Conservative party were ever to regain power? The credit gives individual parents the choice because it puts the money, the tax credit, in their pocket.

Mr. Brady: Parents will not have the choice if playgroups and private providers close due a massive shift of resources to state provision of nursery child care. That is a big problem.

I accept that good child care provision exists in state-funded nurseries in many parts of the country. The borough of Trafford, for many years under Conservative control, has a good record of providing a great number of child care nursery places. I have no difficulty with that. What I object to is a policy that results in the removal of the options for parents.

Child care is perhaps the most personal choice that parents have to make. When one choose to put one's child in the care of others at such a young age, it is important that one should have absolute confidence and faith in the provider. The danger of overwhelming state provision and a move from the voucher model is that less choice is offered. There can be instances where parents have to use local provision, perhaps because they have to put their children into reception classes or in a local authority nursery, regardless of what they would prefer.

The hon. Member for Rochdale referred to what she said was the myth that small businesses cannot afford to pay for flexible working practices. I call the House's attention to another Select Committee report, published some months ago, which is relevant to the debate—that on part-time working by the Select Committee on Education and Employment. We debated that issue at some length.

I see the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey), a former member of that Committee, in his place. He would bear out that there was considerable agreement in Committee about encouraging flexible working practices, flexibility for parents and flexible arrangements to cater for child care and more time with children. Again, there was disagreement on how to deliver those objectives. Today, I have sought to underline that difficulty.

I agree with the hon. Member for Rochdale that flexible working practices are generally better for businesses. That point was made by Labour Members on the Education and Employment Committee on many occasions. My argument is that such arrangements should be promoted. There is reason to encourage other businesses to follow that best practice. I applaud what the Government are doing in that direction, but there is an argument for being cautious about piling up legislation requiring certain action by businesses.

Although some businesses, whether large or small, may be able easily to accommodate the additional costs of flexible arrangements, or may find that the benefits in terms of motivated staff outweigh the costs of regulation,

[Mr. Brady]

of uncertainty in terms of the work force and of difficulties in planning, for many other businesses, such provision is a genuine problem. That is not a myth.

If a small business employing five, 10 or 20 people loses one key employee for three months, that can be a serious matter. Similarly, it would be serious if, as some Labour Members have suggested, they were to lose that employee through maternity leave, when the employee has the right to come back part-time. Not every business can accommodate such flexibility.

Dr. Howells: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. That is why we have concentrated so much on ensuring that it is possible for contracts that are tailored to meet the requirements of small businesses in particular to be arranged. His point is valid, but we have tried to accommodate it as best as is practicable at the moment. We have tried to go with the grain, as he suggested that we should, in promoting best practice—an awful phrase, but it describes something—to ensure that firms have the opportunity to take advantage of mentors in other firms.

Mr. Brady: I am grateful to the Minister. As he will have detected, I was nowhere near to attacking the Government. I was seeking to defend them from some Labour Members, who have said that the Government should go further.

I make no bones about the fact that I would not have gone as far as the Government have in legislation. The Government have damaged business and reduced competitiveness as a result, but some of the arguments that have been advanced by Labour Members would accelerate that damage and make its impact infinitely worse. That is not the most full-spirited compliment that I could offer, but I hope that the Government will resist the voices from behind them who say go further. At the very least, having introduced considerable legislation already—too much legislation—the Government should pause, reflect and look at the consequences in the employment market before contemplating any further steps.

Indeed, that was one of the conclusions of the Education and Employment Committee in its report on part-time working. In paragraph 53, it said:

"We would draw the Government's attention to the range of differing views that were expressed to us about the labour market effects of the implementation of the Directive on Part-time Work and we recommend that the Government publish a review of the effect of the Directive on the labour market and patterns of part-time employment two years after it is implemented."

That was an eminently sensible recommendation. I do not think that I am going too far in revealing the private discussions of the Committee when I say that I would think that because I suggested it. I was pleased, however, that the Committee accepted that that was a sensible approach and agreed that the Government should publish a review of the consequences of their legislation on the labour market.

As a member of the Standing Committee that considered the Employment Relations Bill, I was greatly saddened to find that an amendment that I had tabled to the same effect was brushed aside by the Government.

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): The hon. Gentleman has referred at some length to the work that we have done together on the Select Committee on Education and Employment and the detailed work that we did on the inquiry into part-time working. May I remind him and the House of one other recommendation that the Committee produced in the report, to which, I am glad to say, he also signed up? It covered women returning from maternity leave. Recommendation 10 said that the Committee believed that

"There should be a presumption that women will be allowed to return to work after maternity leave on a part-time basis, with pay and benefits no less favourable . . . than those which they were receiving before they took maternity leave. We recommend that the Government introduce legislation guaranteeing women the right to return to work after maternity leave on a part-time basis".

Mr. Brady: I would be going too far in divulging the private deliberations of the Education and Employment Committee if I responded in full to that point. I shall leave hon. Members to draw their own conclusions. As I am the only Opposition Member to serve on the Select Committee, I do not necessarily go all the way with my friend, the hon. Member for Wentworth.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton referred to the effect of the Government's new deal programme, about which we hear so much. She referred in particular to the new deal for lone parents. It is often suggested that Conservative Members are neolithic in their opposition to the new deal. However, it is demonstrably a waste of public money, huge amounts of which are being squandered on a programme that is not necessarily having the desired effect.

My party and I are not alone in taking such a view. The views of the Greater Manchester low pay unit were recently published in the Manchester *Metro* newspaper—

Mr. Kirkwood: Never heard of it.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman may cast aspersions on the quality of that fine journal, but he may also wish to consider what the Greater Manchester low pay unit had to say. Its view was that young people were being let down by the Government's new deal. It cast doubt on the Government's promise to make young people more employable, and recommended that Ministers should take immediate action. The author of a report on the matter was quoted as saying:

"The government talks about young people having rights and responsibilities, but it is the government that is failing to meet its responsibilities towards young people."

That is hardly a ringing endorsement from a pressure group not particularly associated with the Conservative party.

Lorna Fitzsimons: If the hon. Gentleman believes that the new deal is not tackling unemployment, what policy would he advocate?

Mr. Brady: The hon. Lady kindly gives me the opportunity to blow the myth of the new deal for the young unemployed. The figures for youth unemployment in the years leading up to 1 May 1997 prove that youth unemployment has fallen more slowly since the new deal was introduced than it did previously. Youth unemployment fell more rapidly under the Conservatives than it has since the Labour Government decided to

confiscate huge sums from the former public utilities for a programme that was intended purely to be a propaganda coup.

Labour used a statistic that was clearly going the right way. Youth unemployment was falling rapidly, and Labour pledged to reduce it by 250,000, only to be embarrassed to find when they came to office that there were not 250,000 long-term youth unemployed. The hon. Lady would be wise to consider that unemployment levels today have far more to do with the flexible employment market created—painfully, and in the face of determined opposition from Labour—by Conservative Administrations. That is why our unemployment is lower than that in Germany and other countries.

The hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) has good reasons for no longer being with us, but I was concerned by her approach to my intervention about whether we ought to support marriage as an encouraging environment for child care. Marriage is not the only acceptable environment for child care. Nor should people be penalised for not being married. However, it is legitimate for the state to encourage what is undoubtedly the ideal environment in which to bring up children. Marriage makes it most likely that children will grow up in all the ways that the hon. Member for Rochdale described as ideal. It is generally best if both parents are always there, although I accept, of course, that that is not always so.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham): I am intrigued. What public policy step would the hon. Gentleman take to support marriage? How would he make men and women happier in marriage, thus preventing them from becoming unhappy in their relationships and divorcing? Everyone wants to support marriage, and everyone wants everyone else to be happy, but are there any practical policies to be taken, or is the hon. Gentleman offering mood music? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton is muttering that people would be happier under a Conservative Government, and I am sure that that is true. The right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) might have read in this morning's press that people are certainly found to be happier when married. In fact, the benefit has been calculated financially—at about £60,000. It may not always seem so to everyone who is married—sometimes it seems more, rather than less, expensive—but people are undoubtedly happier in marriage, and it is undoubtedly a better environment within which to bring up children. The Conservative policy is to recognise that fact in the tax system, which is a positive plan. It is a shame that Labour seems determined to give no encouragement to marriage.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): May I offer the hon. Gentleman a personal example? A friend of mine was brought up by unmarried parents, and I was brought up by parents who were married. Mine were divorced when I was three, and her non-married parents remain together to this day. Why should Governments have given my parents more money and hers less?

Mr. Brady: We can all think of particular cases that contradict the rule—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady may laugh at that, but is she seriously arguing that people are not more likely to stay together as parents if they are married? The evidence strongly suggests the opposite.

Ms King: As the alleged exception rather than the rule, I have to say that there were 35 children in my class at school. Of those, only five had parents who were still together. That is a terrible shame, but it proves that the hon. Gentleman is not talking about exceptional cases.

Mr. Brady: That is a terrible shame. However, I am simply arguing that we should seek to combat that situation as far as we can. I accept that what we can do is limited. Social forces cannot always be controlled by Governments. We may be able to achieve only modest benefits, but it is right for Governments to do what they can, even at the margins, to support and encourage marriage. That will lead to people staying together more often, which is good for children. I am by no means extreme on this matter. However, most people would accept that the married state is a good condition within which to bring up children. Governments should therefore support it, not denigrate it.

I have talked about the Select Committee's recommendations on the part-time work directive, as has the hon. Member for Wentworth. I was strongly struck in Committee by the different approaches taken by hon. Members from different sides of the House on how to achieve objectives that we broadly share. Our debate on this points up a difference of approach that centres around whether it is better to plan, legislate and force or to encourage greater freedom and flexibility and freer environment for businesses and individuals to make their decisions.

Labour Members argue that there is a business case for greater flexibility in working practices and that businesses will be more profitable if they offer flexible working practices. In many instances, that is true. Where it is, businesses will need relatively little encouragement to follow that course of action. It is natural for businesses to wish to maximise their profits, so they should be encouraged to do it when it is in their interest. It makes no sense for businesses to be forced into a course of action that may be appropriate to some businesses or to large businesses or to some industries, when such legislative compulsion may lead to the worst of all outcomes: not a flexible environment for parents and families but one in which there is less employment available, where there are fewer businesses and where businesses are less competitive and less able to operate successfully, expand and employ people. The core of the debate between us and the Government about the best outcome for businesses and families is whether high employment protection, even if that means fewer jobs, or an environment with maximum employment opportunities and maximum flexibility is the best route to generating employment.

12.1 pm

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): I served on the Standing Committees that considered the Employment Relations Bill and the National Minimum Wage Bill. They were both highly politically charged and partisan, so I hoped that this debate would be more neutral territory that would allow a more considered discussion of the

[Mr. John Healey]

Government's family friendly policies and the issues at stake. I was therefore disappointed with, but not surprised by, the sharp contribution of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) and the hon. Members for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) for bringing us back to a more measured consideration of the issues.

Family friendly employment policies are shorthand for measures that help employees to combine the requirements of their jobs with their responsibilities to their families. It is an area of policy in which the Government have been very active. I strongly support that. It is right in principle, and the measures that have been taken are right in practice, but they are also necessary to respond to fundamental changes in family patterns, the structure of the labour market, the competitive pressures on business and the public policy ambition of Government following the election on 1 May 1997.

Family friendly policies across Government are a proper response to deep-seated changes around us. They are not the triumph of feminism, a victory in the fight for workers' rights or the heel of Government coming down hard on bad bosses, although I am glad that a little of each is also involved. First and foremost, the Government's family friendly policy measures are as much to do with present-day social and economic imperatives as with political ideology.

If we want children brought up in secure families without poverty, parents to have an opportunity to work, the United Kingdom to be competitive and make the best use of all the talents available in our population, and the UK economy to be run with low unemployment and stable, low inflation, we need family friendly employment policies. The national minimum wage, the working families tax credit, the new rights under the Employment Relations Act 1999, the record increase in child benefit, the new deal—especially the new deal for lone parents—the national child care strategy, sure start and the child care tax credit should be considered together. They mean that, for the first time, many parents have an opportunity to work, or are working in jobs that make work pay, while getting practical help to combine their desire to work with their concern to be good parents and be with their kids as they grow up.

That list of measures is extremely revealing; it involves the Department of Trade and Industry, the Treasury, the Department of Social Security, the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment, as well as the new opportunities fund. An enormous effort is being made throughout government to support families—especially women and children. That support for families will emerge as one of the hallmarks of the Labour Government's first term.

I referred to fundamental changes, both in the world of work and in the world more generally. First, there are social changes—the increasing diversity of family life. The divorce rate is rising and the number of single-parent families is increasing. More children are growing up with step-parents. That increasing diversity makes complex demands on employed parents. Secondly, there are changing demographic trends. The average age of the general population and of the work force is rising; that means that the proportion of people who have jobs and responsibility for the care of the elderly is increasing, and will continue to increase.

Thirdly, employment trends are changing. The increasing participation of women in the work force, because of the growth in part-time working, and the demand from firms for more flexible rostering, mean that more women are now in work and also caring for people at home. Over the past 10 years, part-time jobs have risen from 24 to 29 per cent. as a proportion of the total number of jobs in the economy.

In areas such as the one in South Yorkshire that I represent, that change has been even more rapid and more brutal. In Rotherham, between 1981 and 1991, we lost 12,000 coal and steel jobs. We gained 9,000 jobs in the service sector during that time, but they were mainly low paid and part-time, and were mostly taken by women.

For employees—both male and female—those changes mean that, in future, the lives of a larger proportion of the work force will be affected in some way by their caring responsibilities. For employers, the changes mean that more of their staff will want access to more flexible working arrangements—with paid and unpaid leave. Fewer of their staff will be willing, or able, regularly to work long hours. The capacity of their employees to cope with the demands of their job and their home responsibilities may be affected, leading to increased sickness, ill health and lower productivity.

There are two main aspects to the challenge to frame the right public policy response to those changes. The first is the regulation of the labour market and the second is the operation of the labour market. The challenge in regulating the labour market must be for legislation and policy to foster a new balance between flexibility for employers and security for employees in the workplace. There must be a balance between prescription of legal minimum standards and scope for implementation that suits the employer and the employees. The modern pressures on business mean that firms need adaptable employees and flexible working, while the modern pressures on family life and on income mean that parents need security in their employment.

The Standing Committee on the Employment Relations Bill received a briefing from the CBI that was broadly supportive of the parts of the Bill—now an Act—that dealt with family friendly policies. Recently, as a follow-up comment on that section of the Act, which is due to take effect on 15 December, the CBI concluded that

"we support the approach which the Government has adopted. We believe the proposals strike a reasonable balance between individual rights and business realities."

The British Chambers of Commerce have urged the Government to issue clearer guidance on how far voluntary arrangements for parental leave can differ from the statutory model. The BCC noted that

"employers and employees entitled to parental leave may find it more practical to make arrangements for working part time over a period of time for their parental leave, rather than taking full time leave."

The TUC advanced the same argument and proposed that there should be no cut-off for eligibility for parental leave, that there should be some form of paid parental leave, and that the age limit for parents looking after disabled

children should be raised. Those are the sort of judgments the Government must make when preparing the regulations, not only on paternity leave, but on the extension of maternity leave and on time off for domestic emergencies. The challenge lies in striking the balance between flexibility and security, legal prescription and the promotion of good practice.

A powerful publicity campaign is needed to support the introduction of the new rights. Ten days ago in my constituency, I led a seminar attended by trade union officials and a couple of dozen local employers. One employer, on the assumption that the range of family friendly employment policies mattered only to women, said that if the new rights came into force, firms would stop employing women. We heard that same argument when the equal pay legislation was introduced, when maternity rights were strengthened and when the minimum wage was introduced. The fact is that employers did not stop employing women then and they will not stop now. However, that employer's incorrect assumption underlines the importance of disseminating accurate information and running a proper promotion and publicity campaign.

We are pushing at an opening, if not fully open, door. Companies increasingly regard family friendly provision as a business solution rather than a legal obligation. I am privileged to have served on the Select Committee on Education and Employment, which carried out an exhaustive study of part-time working, already mentioned by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West.

The Committee took evidence from Mr. Nigel Broome of Sainsbury, who told the Committee:

"almost overnight we made many, many thousands of temporary colleagues"—

his description—

"permanent, and we believe we have reaped the benefit of that action."

He was keen to tell us that Sainsbury takes a positive attitude to part-time workers, saying that they

"need to be valued and treated in the same way . . . have access to the same terms and conditions, and have the benefits and training and other services we provide, because at the end of the day they will provide the competitive edge and in many cases it is the part-timers who are serving our public at the most crucial times and busiest times of the week."

The Committee heard the same arguments from Tesco and from Norwich Union and other financial services providers that submitted evidence. The Midland bank mentioned that it described its part-time employees not as part-timers, but as key timers. Being part time and flexible need not mean being temporary, insecure and poorly paid.

That was underlined by a report published last month by the Department for Education and Employment, which analysed the business case for family friendly employment policies and their practice and implementation among a number of companies. It drew five key business benefits from family friendly practices, the first of which was reduced casual sickness absence. The study reported that most employers felt that sickness absence due to employees caring responsibilities had been reduced. That was reinforced by employees interviewed as part of the study, who felt more able to be honest about absence caused by dependants illnesses.

The second benefit was improved retention: each of the firms in the study was able to identify individuals who had stayed with them longer because of access to family friendly provision. The third benefit was improved productivity: many of the firms were convinced that those of their employees who worked flexible hours were more productive than those who worked longer, traditional hours.

Fourthly, the firms reported improved recruitment. They believed that offering family friendly practices attracted potential recruits that they would not otherwise have had when filling vacancies. The fifth business benefit was the improved morale and commitment of the work force. When family friendly policies benefit business, the work force and their families, there is a powerful case for Government action.

My second point is the operation of the labour market. The challenge for legislation and public policy is to create the opportunity for people to work, to make work pay better than benefits and to help people take that step into work. For two reasons, I strongly endorse the Government's approach of introducing measures that encourage not only the unemployed but the economically inactive into work.

The first reason is the legacy of the Tory years. The jobs legacy that we inherited from the previous Government was a huge underemployment problem, flattered by the unemployment figures. At the time of the 1997 election, economic inactivity was at a record high—7.5 million people of working age were not working or looking for work. When the economy expands, economic inactivity usually falls. However, in 1997, male economic inactivity was 10 per cent. higher than in the trough of the previous recession in 1993. Four in every five of nearly 1 million lone parents wanted to work, or wanted to work more.

The second reason is that, by getting more unemployed people into work and by bringing more economically inactive people into contact with the labour market, we contribute to reducing the non-inflationary rate of unemployment in the economy. That is part of the current picture of improving growth, stable low inflation, rising employment and falling unemployment. Family friendly employment policies are central to persuading economically inactive people that work is worth seeking and in their interests. Such policies are crucial to making the labour market more effective.

As a member of the Select Committee on Education and Employment, I was involved in a study of the new deal for lone parents. The impact of the new deal on Rotherham in my area is impressive. In the past six months, 221 lone parents attended an interview: 86 per cent. have kept in contact with their new deal adviser, and 70 are now in work. One in three of those lone parents are now working in a labour market in which unemployment rates are twice the national average and problems of deep-seated, long-term unemployment are as bad as anywhere in the country.

While performance is encouraging the testimony of some lone parents is truly inspiring. Laura lives near me in Rotherham. She applied for a job at a local hospital but had not thought about the financial impact and had made no provision or inquiries about child care. She was becoming despondent after trying to contact various agencies to solve the problem. She sat down with a new deal adviser for lone parents, who explained her job of collating all the information and helping Laura to make an in-work benefit calculation. Laura was unimpressed with the results based on family credit.

[Mr. John Healey]

However, as the beginning of October was approaching, the new deal adviser suggested that they make an in-work benefit calculation based on the working families tax credit. The adviser confirmed that 70 per cent. of Laura's child care costs would be paid and her maintenance would be disregarded. The calculation revealed that, if Laura claimed the working families tax credit, she would benefit by an additional £65.52 a week compared with her existing circumstances on income support. By working for 16 hours a week, Laura could make herself and her family better off by £137 a week. That demonstrates the impact of the working families tax credit.

Ms Harman: I was interested in, and encouraged by, that example. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is not only a financial benefit to that family because of the extra income that they will receive, but a solution to the problem, which many hon. Members are concerned about, of children being brought up in workless households where they see only a pattern of benefit dependency? Children learn about the world of work by seeing their parents going out to work. Is not that one of the important benefits of the new deal for lone parents and the working families tax credit?

Mr. Healey: My right hon. Friend reminds me that another aspect of the jobs legacy that we inherited from the Tories in May 1997 was that one in five households containing someone of working age had no one in work. In areas such as my constituency that was a deep-seated problem, and the new deal, which the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West criticised, has played an important part in breaking the cycle of generational unemployment. In Rotherham, 45 per cent. of those eligible for the new deal had never worked but, since the new deal was introduced, more than 1,000 have found work. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that many would not have found those jobs without the new deal.

Lorna Fitzsimons: At a recent jobs fair in my town hall, the Employment Service staff who are responsible for implementing the new deal for single parents said that it was the most ecstatic job experience that they had ever had because they were delivering a product that they believed in and that people wanted. They could not cope with the demand, such was the interest from women and single parents who had heard, by word of mouth, that the new deal could give them what they wanted—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady cannot make a second speech. That was a very long intervention. I remind her also that she should face the Chair when she makes her remarks.

Mr. Healey: My hon. Friend made a point that all Labour Members will recognise. In my discussions with new deal advisers, they often tell me that they are now doing the job that they wanted to do when they first entered the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency or, in the case of advisers to lone parents, the Child Support Agency. That has been a liberation for them. The advice and detailed personal support that they are able to give to their clients, backed by the range of family friendly support and employment rights that are now in place, mean that they are now able to help people in a way that they felt they could not before.

The working families tax credit has pride of place in the panoply of family friendly employment measures taken by the Government in the past two years. By 2001, 1.4 million working families will be receiving the working families tax credit—500,000 more than would have been receiving family credit. After just over a month of operation, 600,000 calls have been taken by the working families tax credit advice line and more than 160,000 people have been identified as eligible and sent claim forms. The working families tax credit will transform work opportunities for parents and increase the levels of family income and quality of life for almost 3 million children.

The national minimum wage, the working families tax credit, the new deal and the new employment rights in the Employment Relations Act 1999 are the fulfilment of manifesto commitments. If one also accepts that our family friendly policies are the right response to help people achieve a better balance between work and home life, to certain competitive pressures on business, to structural changes in patterns of employment and to our pursuit of full employment, logic insists that, as broad social and economic changes continue, our family friendly employment policies must also develop.

Like so many in the House and outside, I warmly welcome the steps that have already been taken. I shall watch their impact with interest and join in arguments over how to build on the base that we have established.

12.25 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I shall make a short speech, because I have only one point to make.

This week, an obituary of Lord Jakobovits, the former Chief Rabbi, was published. He was a towering figure. Towards the end of his life, his greatest pleasure was the fact that one wall of his house was covered with pictures of his 38 grandchildren. He gave some marvellous speeches during his time in the other place. If he were here, I am sure that he would say that much of what we have been discussing this morning can be no more than a palliative. Families and the nation are best supported by following the Judaeo-Christian tradition that he regularly defended robustly, diligently and skilfully.

I am not going to climb on my soapbox and rant about that today, because everybody knows my views. Regardless of whether I like it, we have to accept that society has changed. Not all people get married and stay married with a sense of lifelong commitment. Not all young mothers want to stay at home and bring up their children. Divorces, the break-up of marriages and the desire of mothers to work are all increasing. Hon. Members may be surprised to hear me say that we have to accept that state of affairs when we frame our policies. I do not want to take those trends lying down. As I said when I intervened on the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), we can influence social trends. For example, we do not strengthen families by making divorce easier. However, we have to accept society as it is.

Last week, the Social Security Select Committee visited Finland and Norway. This time last week, I was with my colleagues at a day centre in Finland. In Finland, every

mother can place her child, from the age of one, in a full-time nursery. If she does not wish to do that, she is entitled to a generous grant from the state for looking after her child at home.

I was impressed by what I found out in Norway and Finland. In Norway last year, there were just 19 teenage pregnancies. In Finland—I cannot believe this figure, but we were told it—there were no teenage pregnancies. We have to recognise that, in this country, we are not managing matters very well. There may be other reasons why there are no teenage pregnancies in Finland, but I suspect that the fact that families there are fully supported by the state is an important factor.

I know that there are serious implications for public spending in such policies and I am not recommending that we immediately copy the Nordic model. However, we have to recognise one point—and this is the only point that I want to make. In the society that we are moving towards, whether we like it or not, in which there is an increasing trend for young mothers to work, we have to encourage fathers to take equal responsibility for their children below the age of five. That is why—surprisingly in the view of some—I was happy to put my name to the report published by the Social Security Select Committee. It suggested not only that parental leave should become a fact of life—it will be a fact of life—but that it should be paid; and that, given that small employers simply cannot take up the burden, the state must take it up.

That comment may sound surprising, coming from someone who has a bit of a reputation as a Thatcherite, but I am simply trying to address society as I find it. In this country—as the Minister said, in a speech that was at times excellent—fathers work longer, and spend less time with their children, than those in any other country in Europe. We have more teenage pregnancies, more family breakdown and more stress on families than any other country in Europe has. We must address that. If we do not, we are building up enormous problems, and huge social costs, for our society. Therefore I was happy to put my name to the Select Committee report.

When I was in Finland, I was very impressed when I heard that the country's Prime Minister had taken several weeks' parental leave. It is an extraordinary situation. Could hon. Members envisage it happening here, with our manic work culture? Parental leave should be taken by all sections of society. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), who has just had a baby, has been made a Minister. I hope that her husband, Ed Balls, will take parental leave from the Treasury. He may be the chief economic adviser and a very important man, but if the Prime Minister of Finland can take parental leave, Ed Balls can take time off to look after his children. The economy might run slightly better if he did.

I agree that the changes recommended in the report will involve dramatic changes in the way that we structure society. I know that the focus has been largely on people who live in poverty or near poverty—we have heard about the working families tax credit—but many of the problems extend right up the income scale. The hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) quoted a study that had been done on 1,500 men working in the financial sector; only 42 had taken any parental leave. Throughout society—right up the income scale—men are not seeing enough of their children.

When I knew that I wanted to speak in the debate, I took the trouble to consult a person who was working in the retail sector, doing a very ordinary job on the shop floor. Enormous pressures are placed on people in the retail sector. Contrary to all the undertakings that we were given during the debates on Sunday trading—I voted against the liberalisation of Sunday trading because I saw that it would happen—the person to whom I spoke said, "You can only get a job if you agree to work on Sundays". He has now been told that he must work on Sundays and on every bank holiday throughout the Christmas period. He must work on new year's eve, right up to 5 pm. As it happens, he is a young man and has no children, but if he had, when would he see his children? He has to work from 9 pm to 7 pm every day. That is what is happening in the retail sector.

I do not have the solution, but I do know that, unless we have the courage to understand society as it is, and to create a firm principle of society that fathers have as much of a duty as mothers to look after their children, we shall never make a better society.

12.33 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I am honoured to follow such a commendable speech by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). I welcome the honesty of the speeches that have been made from both sides of the House. The hon. Gentleman said that we must view the matter in terms of what is happening in the real world. Regardless of whether we like change, it has happened.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Lorna Fitzsimons) and I were both 29 when we were elected to the House, and we can tell hon. Members, in case they had not noticed, that life for our generation has changed beyond recognition. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) is not so much beyond our age group—

Mr. Brady: I was also 29 when I was elected, but I have not aged as well as the hon. Lady.

Ms King: I apologise for having mistaken you for middle-aged. You evidently have the aura of an elder statesman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady must remember to use the correct parliamentary language.

Ms King: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This debate is about time and money. It is about people having enough time to bring up their children and care for their relatives, and enough money to prevent their development or care being stunted by poverty.

I congratulate the Government on the steps that have been taken so far. The difference in the attitude between this Government and the previous Administration—although not necessarily current Front-Bench spokespersons—is the difference between night and day. However, as other speakers have pointed out, we must continue to move on and move further.

The Nordic model has been mentioned. In five or 10 years, and I hope sooner, that will be the norm in Britain. Eventually, in any civilised society, a woman will

[Ms King]

have the right and the ability to put her child into care or some kind of provision from the time the child is one year old.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Lady make it clear that a woman should have a choice between putting her child in a full-time nursery or looking after the child at home and being paid by the state for so doing? That is an important point.

Ms King: It is an extremely important point, and I wholeheartedly commend the concept of choice. I shall return to the subject of choice and flexibility.

Although my hon. Friend the Minister for Competitiveness is no longer in his place, I congratulate him on his appointment and look forward to the contribution that he will make, given his experience in the trade union movement.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) for her campaigning efforts to raise awareness of the problems faced by many parents in maintaining the balance between work and parenting commitments. I am particularly indebted to her for the research that she commissioned from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies and the policy proposals that have arisen from it.

In their employment policies, the Government have recognised that families are changing. In the vocabulary of the modern business lexicon, we would say that families are more flexible. Too often, as we have heard, marriage or any type of stable partnership is no longer for life. Following on from the comments of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West, I want to put it on record that I, like most of our generation, believe in a stable partnership and do not care whether that is in the institutionalised framework of marriage.

Our generation should not be penalised for not choosing the establishment route of marriage. The most important aim is to ensure that the children are not penalised. That can be achieved only by encouraging couples—not necessarily married couples—to stay together in stable relationships.

The good news is that children can be, and often are, nurtured in all types of families. It is the role of the state not to dictate the shape of those families, but to stop employers discriminating against families and parents. All too often, that has been translated into straightforward discrimination against women. However, men now recognise that they are losing out as much as women have done. They are being deprived of their rights as fathers.

I would like employers to recognise the benefits of embracing social change rather than retreating from it. That will be difficult because of the current "hire 'em and fire 'em" mentality that pervades many businesses, but, with the political leadership that the Government have shown, it should not be impossible. Half the battle has been won. Employers recognise that the most important investment is investment in human capital. Family friendly policies are part of that investment. Only the most churlish employer—or, perhaps, Opposition spokesperson—could fail to welcome the measures that the Government have already introduced to make the workplace more family friendly. From the look of consternation on the faces of Opposition Front Benchers, perhaps they welcome those measures. Among them are the introduction of a 13-week period of parental leave, which is a vital step in enabling parents to take time off in the first five years of their child's life without worrying about losing their jobs.

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, particularly as she drew attention to the expression on my face. If the Government believe that parental leave is the right policy, why have they not made it paid leave? As we have discussed, unpaid leave makes it a policy for the few, not the many. I hope that she will use her influence, because it is obviously much greater than mine, to persuade Ministers to do what they think is right and to be prepared to pay for that themselves, rather than expect other people to pick up the tab on their behalf.

Ms King: Is the hon. Lady supporting paid parental leave?

Mrs. Browning: We made our views on that very clear when the legislation went through Parliament, but the Government have created an unfair policy. She will know that, because she will be receiving the same post as I am from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and others. It is not for the Opposition to clear up the mess of an ill-thought-through Government policy; it is up to them, as the legislators and the Executive in the House, to put fair and just policies on the statute book. That is their responsibility, but they have clearly failed to satisfy the hon. Lady and her friends that their policy is fair or just.

Ms King: The policy that the Government have put on the statute book represents the first step taken by this country, or by any Government, to make family friendly policies pay at work and I welcome that, although I hope that they go further. I echo the comments of other Members who made that point, but it is impossible to deny the astonishing achievements that have been made so far.

Mr. Pond: Taking account of the comments made by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), is my hon. Friend aware that the Confederation of British Industry has described the introduction of parental leave as a seismic shift in favour of family friendly employment policies? Is there not some difference between what it believes to be important and what the hon. Lady appears to believe?

Ms King: I was not aware of that, but it has been drawn to my attention that the CBI is eminently sensible and reasonable in its approach to many policies. I hope that Opposition Front Benchers might adopt such an approach at some point.

Let me return to the steps that the Government have taken. People can have time off for family emergencies, the working time directive has been implemented, the statutory right to four weeks' annual paid leave has been extended and the national child care strategy, which was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham, provides 1 million places. All those measures not only shore up the position of parents,

but encourage those parents outside the labour market to seek work safe in the knowledge that their children will not suffer as a result.

The working families tax credit and the forthcoming child care tax credit will play a vital role in encouraging parents back to the workplace. Those are all ways of ensuring that the workplace is not hostile to people with young families. However, we must go past the point of neutralising hostility and actually achieve a welcoming environment. That will require a renewed commitment from the Government and a sea change in attitudes among many employers.

The research that I mentioned earlier, commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham, revealed two interesting points. Clearly, every child is different and has different needs, but the research showed that the prospects for a child's development may be improved if the mother has the choice of staying at home during the first year. I wish that I had that choice. Of course, if I were to have a child, I would not be able to stay at home for my child's first year. If we worry about future generations, we should give British mothers that choice.

The research also showed that a child's development may be improved further, or at least not harmed, if the mother then goes out to work when her child is a year old. I urge the Government to consider the conclusions of the research so that it informs future Government policy.

I have no hesitation in echoing the appeal made by my right hon. Friend first, to extend the right to return to work from six to 12 months and, secondly, to extend maternity pay so that low-paid mothers benefit. It simply is not fair if only middle-class parents benefit from changes.

Looking to the future, I hope that mothers will be given the right to work part time after maternity leave. That suggestion was made by the Select Committee on Education and Employment and was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey). Mothers should be able to return to work part time, unless their employer can show that that would cause the business considerable harm.

I also support paid parental leave. I believe that, in five or 10 years' time, it will be the norm in any civilised society. The case for paid parental leave was made by my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly), for Rochdale and for Wentworth, and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), among others. I congratulate the Social Security Committee on its report on that subject and urge the Government to consider their response to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West pointed out that paid parental leave at a flat rate of £100 a week would cost the Treasury an estimated £285 million a year. I concur with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, who said that he cannot imagine how that money could be better spent. We cannot afford not to spend the money in that way. Above all, it is what parents want. As the Government survey of 30,000 women showed, women do not want the Government to make choices for them; they want the Government to support them in the choices that they make.

Mothers face enormous difficulties in trying to reconcile the work-life dichotomy. For example, one of the technical difficulties that they face is the administrative nightmare of statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance.

A young mother, who recently visited my constituency surgery, is still waiting for her claim for statutory maternity pay to be paid more than two years after making it. That is not only because her former employer is being obstructive, but because of the lack of competence at the local Benefits Agency office. Opposition from employers and an inadequate administrative response from Benefits Agency offices combine to put new mothers in an intolerable position.

I welcome with open arms the idea of replacing statutory maternity pay, maternity allowance and child care tax credits for babies in the first 12 months by something along the lines of a baby tax credit. That is a sensible idea, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's views on that.

We must break down not only the physical barriers to making work and parenting more compatible, but the mental attitudes in the workplace. Young women with babies often do not get the promotions that they deserve. I am delighted that the Government have shown that that is not case here by promoting my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). That was an exceptionally well-deserved promotion. She has a five-month-old baby, and is the youngest Minister in this Government. I hope that we shall put our own house in order, so that women in the home, in the House and in society at large have the rights and opportunities that they deserve.

For that to happen, a key change is required. Time for children must become an important workplace issue. I had a conversation with—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Lady that she should address the Chair.

Ms King: I appreciate your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have never received guidance from anyone other than the Chair on what one should do, so I am grateful to you for that.

I recall a conversation with my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham. She told me that, 10 years ago, it was not acceptable for her to tell the Whips that she had a problem and had to see her child who needed her. I am sure that our Whips are no longer like that.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): Not at all.

Ms King: I am delighted to have that on the record. The Whip affirms that that is no longer a problem for women MPs. However, it is a problem in most workplaces. Most forward-thinking employers tell us—studies in this area confirm this—that employees who enjoy a good balance between work and family life are more productive, motivated and committed, and therefore more valuable than those who do not.

I concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), who said that the work-life balance remains a pipe dream. I worked in the European Parliament with a young French women. She returned to France and I returned to Britain. She became a French civil servant and I became a British Member of Parliament. We regularly worked 80-hour weeks, and we used to say how amazing it would be if we lived in a world in which we were expected to work only 35 hours

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a week. She now lives in a country whose Government have introduced a 35-hour week. I am certain that there will be many obstacles to that working effectively, but I have not yet noticed the French economy or the French Government falling apart as a result of introducing a 35-hour week. That woman is now a senior civil servant with 20 civil servants working under her, and she works a 35-hour week, but, as I have said, for those of us here, that remains a pipe dream. I hope we soon recognise that we must make more efforts in this regard if we are to have socially functioning families.

At the beginning of the century, Labour campaigned, along with the trade unions, for the day to be divided into eight hours for work, eight hours for rest and eight hours for family and recreation. Today, a hundred years on, the eight-hour day is still as far away as an alien from outer space—for most Members of Parliament, certainly. I hope that we shall eventually evolve into a more civilised society.

Let me return to the central point about time and money. This may seem a sweeping generalisation, but while, high-income parents have the money and low-income parents have the time, neither group enjoys the quality of life that we expect today. Indeed, many working women—many stressed-out working parents—consider that their position is worse than it would have been 50 years ago. Let us give parents choice, and work towards the creation of that more civilised society.

12.57 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): It is a delight to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), whose speech proved that diverse families can give their children the opportunities and encouragement that will enable them to attain the highest office. She is known in the House for her enthusiasm and energy, as well as her optimism—although, in this respect, her optimism may be a little over-enthusiastic. I remind her that Henry Ford introduced a maximum working week of 48 hours in 1916, on the basis that that would increase productivity in his car plants. It has taken 85 years or more for such arrangements to be introduced in this country, under a Labour Government. I expect the pace of change to be somewhat faster from now on.

My hon. Friend mentioned the research commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). Along with many other Members, I pay tribute to her for the work that she has done over many years on family friendly policies. I can confirm that, nowadays, the Whips have a very understanding attitude to those who have family responsibilities and need to strike a balance between child care and work. I am not sure that an institution that normally begins its working day one hour before the schools close can yet describe itself as family friendly, but at least we are moving in the right direction.

When preparing my speech, I recalled seeing, some time ago, a crowd of people jostling around a busker who was playing a violin. I thought it surprising that so many people were interested, because he was not a particularly good violinist. He was competent, but not that great. As I drew closer, I realised that the interest was prompted by the fact that he was standing on a rope stretched between two trees. He was not a particularly good tightrope artist either. I wondered whether the crowd was there to admire his musical talents, to admire his abilities as a tightrope artist, or to see whether he fell off.

Many working parents find themselves in a similar position to that busker. They desperately want to be the best parents that they can be, just as he probably wanted to be the best violinist that he could be. They desperately want to do the best that they can for their children, but, at the same time, to achieve whatever they can at work—to build a career, to use their energies and abilities and to ensure that they can use their contributions at work to build the best possible standard of living for their families and children. Most of all, they desperately do not want to fall off the tightrope.

The job of Government and of society generally is to ensure that we support families with children, who are trying to balance work responsibilities with family responsibilities and who find it difficult to achieve that balance. As a society or Government, we should not metaphorically applaud when they fall off the tightrope, but try to ensure that the safety net is there.

As I have said, I am not sure that the House is presenting itself yet as a family-friendly working institution, but it is important that we send the message to the country as a whole that we understand the pressures under which families find themselves—financial and emotional—in trying to square the circle between family life and work. As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said, the issue becomes all the more important given the Government's determination to do everything that they can to encourage people to enter the world of work and to give them the opportunity to do so and the support that they need to achieve that.

Several Conservative Members have commented on the welfare to work strategy. It is worth putting it on the record that 500,000 more people are in employment now—that is the increase in the number of jobs created since the Government took office. Long-term unemployment has reduced by 50 per cent. over a relatively short time. Youth unemployment has fallen by 60 per cent. over the same period.

We heard some remarks that might be considered to be rather sneering—I am not sure whether that term is unparliamentary—about the new deal and its effects on young people. There was even a quote from the Greater Manchester low pay unit to suggest that it was sceptical about the effect of the new deal.

As the chair and a trustee of the national Low Pay Unit—the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) is also a trustee—I can confirm that that organisation certainly does not sneer at the new deal. It applauds the fact that the new deal is giving real opportunities to young people, people with disabilities and older unemployed people, and that it is intended to ensure that people make the best use of their abilities and can fulfil their aspirations. The Greater Manchester low pay unit is not part of that national organisation. It is a local organisation that has its own policies and I cannot speak for it.

In trying to balance work and family, the difficulty for many parents was that the only jobs that they could feasibly take were part time. Often, those jobs were insecure or poorly paid, but were the only ones that could be taken by someone who had family responsibilities.

Inevitably, they faced the difficult, almost heart-breaking, trade-off between wanting to do whatever they could to ensure that they built a decent income and standard of living for their children, and giving their children enough of the care and attention that they needed to fulfil their aspirations.

According to the CBI, we still have a situation, before the new legislation is in force, where some form of parental leave provision is available only to 28 per cent. of employees. The fact that regulations have been laid in Parliament this week giving parents, for the first time, the statutory right to parental leave of up to 13 weeks for the first five years of a child's life is especially welcome. I also welcome the fact that the Government have taken on board the representations that have been made on behalf of parents of children with disabilities. It will be possible for those parents to claim their right to parental leave for a longer period of the child's life.

Although such measures are welcome to most people in the country and in this House, we have heard a rather puzzling presentation from the Conservative party. I hope that the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) will tell us exactly what the Conservative position is. I am puzzled, because only a few days ago on the BBC Radio 4 programme "Westminster Hour", I heard the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), the Opposition spokesman on agriculture, telling listeners:

> "There are other areas which the European Union is getting into, social legislation such as the length of time perhaps you might give for paternity leave, and we believe it's right that individual countries should be free to opt out of those measures if they want".

Yet the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) has said that her main concern is that such parental leave will not be paid. I am pleased to see that she is about to intervene; it would be terribly helpful if she can tell us whether her party's policy has changed since Sunday and is now in support of paid parental leave.

Mrs. Browning: I have made this point on three occasions this morning, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman missed all three. We have raised the question of paid parental leave because all Members of Parliament, including Conservative Members, are being lobbied by the NSPCC and other bodies to encourage us to tell the relevant Ministers that the Government's policy on parental leave is seriously flawed. The Government's policy is unjust; it is for the few and not the many, and the only people who can take advantage of it are the well-off, not those on lower incomes.

Labour Members must not believe that they can duck their responsibility, as members of the party in office. They cannot seek remedies to a badly thought-through, unfair, unjust policy by throwing the responsibility back on to the Conservative party. Conservative policies for the next election will decided by our Front-Bench team and made public when we are ready. That is exactly what the Labour party did when it was in opposition. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will commend that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is an extremely long intervention.

Mr. Pond: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You may rule me out of order for referring to an issue such as horticulture in this context, but there is a phrase about what to do when in a hole—stop digging. Those listening to this debate who also listened to the hon. Member for South Suffolk on Sunday will now be very puzzled, but there are those who understand, as I do, that the Conservative party is opposed to the principle of parental leave. A million parents will be putting a note behind the clock to remind themselves that, should there ever be another Conservative Government, they would lose the right to parental leave, paid or unpaid.

Mrs. Browning: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not deliberately mean to mislead the House about the Conservative party's views. I have made our policies quite clear—we will come forward at the right time. It is misleading for him to say that we have made a policy statement on the matter. We have not. What people will be putting behind the clock is a little note to remind themselves that they cannot take advantage of his Government's policies—they are not well off enough to do so.

Mr. Pond: Several hon. Members shook their heads when the hon. Lady said that she had made the policy clear. It is not clear to those present, and I am sure that it is not clear to those listening to our deliberations. I am afraid that confusion rules.

Ms Harman: May I help my hon. Friend in seeking to clarify the situation? I take it that he is asking whether the Opposition favour what we are doing now and whether they think that leave should be paid now. They may be justified in not saying what will be in their next manifesto, but are we not entitled to know now whether they agree that parental leave should be introduced as a legal right and whether it should be paid? He has not yet managed to elicit that information.

Mr. Pond: I thank my right hon. Friend for clarifying the position. Until we get some clarification from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, I think that the position is that some of the Opposition agree with the policy and some do not. As with so many areas of Opposition policy, they are not quite sure whether they agree but it is worth scoring a few political points if they can.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Can my hon. Friend help clarify a puzzling conundrum? One of the problems of poverty pay is being able to access unpaid leave, but the Opposition do not support the national minimum wage, the working families tax credit or any of our policies to stop poverty pay.

Mr. Pond: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I shall develop a little. This is not the only family friendly policy on which the Opposition are confused. Some 1,800 of my constituents would like to know whether their policy is to withdraw from them the working families tax credit and the additional child care provision that goes with it. That would mean an average tax rise of £24 a week for every one of those working families. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) said, some people would lose even more as a result of the Opposition's opposition to the credit, if they ever got the chance to scrap it. Some families would lose more than £100 a week. I see that the hon. Member

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for Tiverton and Honiton is anxious to set the record straight. We may hear this time exactly what the Opposition's current policy is. Will they keep the working families tax credit or scrap it?

Mrs. Browning: I am delighted to respond to the hon. Gentleman. Unflattering as it is, his constituents, like mine, do want to know not what the Conservative policy is but what the Government's policy is. I refer him to the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who has said:

"It's not a case of if the Government will pay for parental leave but when."

That is what our constituents and the NSPCC want to know. When will the Government decide whether they will support the policy with some money?

Mr. Pond: We still do not know exactly what the hon. Lady's position is. People know exactly what the Government's position is on all those issues. We have stated it clearly on parental leave. My hon. Friend the Minister stated clearly the Government's commitment to family friendly policies and explained the ways in which they are being implemented. Several Labour Members listed them for the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton. Our constituents know that the Government are committed to the working families tax credit because we have just introduced it. It will make a significant difference to the income of low-paid working families doing their best to balance their income needs with the time available.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) got himself into a bit of a muddle when he mentioned some recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures on tax burdens. I am glad that he has re-entered the Chamber. Pagers are a wonderful means of getting hon. Members back to respond.

Mr. Brady: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pond: The hon. Gentleman has only just walked back in. If he pauses for a few more moments, he will hear my point and then I will be happy to take an intervention.

The hon. Gentleman was in a bit of a muddle because he used figures that are somewhat outdated and that refer to calendar rather than to financial years. Much of the increase in the so-called tax burden that he thinks that he has identified applied to the period when the previous Government were in office. Perhaps he would like to tell people why, under his Government, who promised that they would cut taxes, there was a significant increase in the tax burden. As a result of their mismanagement of the economy, the Conservative Government left us to deal with a major public debt problem. If the hon. Gentleman would like to give the House a justification for that, I shall willingly give way to him.

Mr. Brady: First, I point out to the hon. Gentleman that I was not paged to return the Chamber; I finished my cup of tea and came back to rejoin the debate.

It is odd that the hon. Gentleman tries to discount all the findings of the OECD, on the basis that it uses calendar rather than financial years. Nearly three years into the Labour Government, our tax burden is higher than Germany's for the first time in a generation, and it is the fastest rising in Europe. He cannot get away from that fact.

Mr. Pond: That must be game, set and match.

The OECD is an extremely efficient organisation. The Government give it great support. However, it is not so efficient that it can provide figures on tax burdens up to the latest 20 minutes. The hon. Gentleman refers to the figures for 1997, when the Conservative Government, whom he supported, were responsible for those matters, and those for part of 1998.

Mr. Brady: If the hon. Gentleman wants further corroboration, I suggest that he looks at his Government's Red Book, where it is patently clear that the tax burden has increased, is increasing and will continue to increase under the Labour Government.

Mr. Pond: If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting ways in which we might cut back on some of the expenditure to which we have committed ourselves—on the health service, on education, on child care, on pensioners and on people with disabilities—perhaps he would tell the House which of those categories he would choose.

Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Canning Town): Does my hon. Friend agree with this morning's reports that the OECD figures include the year in which the Labour Government levied the windfall tax to pay for the new deal? Does he agree that the figures run from January to January, and that we were dealing with the debts left by the previous Government? There was a blip, but there was no increasing trend in taxation—taxation is still on a downward spiral.

Mr. Pond: That is precisely the point; I thank my hon. Friend for making it so clearly. The Labour Government have an enviable record—as the public understand—on their management of the public finances. That cannot be said for the previous Government—who are represented by Members on the Opposition Benches.

As the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West has finished his cup of tea and returned to the Chamber, will he tell us whether, while he makes accusations about increases in the tax burden—we know that they are mythical and that the increase is largely attributable to the Governments whom he supported—he also supports the increases in taxation on low-income working families that would result from the abolition of the working families tax credit? Alternatively, as a member of the Employment Sub-Committee, does he support the working families tax credit?

Mr. Brady: The taxes that the Government impose are being levied on low-paid as well as high-paid workers. The costs of running a car or of buying a house hit people with low incomes as well as those with middle and higher incomes. He cannot get away from the fact the Government are increasing taxes—they are hurting everybody.

Mr. Pond: That does not answer my question. My constituents and, no doubt, those of the hon. Gentleman

will take the message that he would support the abolition of the working families tax credit, if he had the opportunity to do so.

The hon. Gentleman repeated the question of whether the Government should support family structures through taxation. It is clear from the measures implemented by the Government, especially the working families tax credit, that we are doing precisely that. However, like previous Conservative Governments, we do not support a tax allowance for married couples that does not focus on the needs of families with children, because that is not the way to assist such families. The resources saved by phasing out the married couples tax allowance—a process which began under the Conservatives—have been concentrated by the Labour Government on the biggest-ever increase in child benefit and the working families tax credit, two measures that will help families to strike the balance between work and family needs.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Am I correct in believing that unmarried couples could be eligible for the married couples tax allowance, and that, depending on when they were divorced, some people received the allowance twice? Therefore, was not the allowance totally anomalous?

Mr. Pond: That is indeed the reason the allowance was such an ineffective mechanism for helping families, especially those with children. It was especially ineffective in helping low income families. The notion entertained by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West that the patter of tiny tax allowances is the way to ensure happiness in families is somewhat awry.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire has said that the Social Security Committee has this week published its report on the social security implications of parental leave. During that investigation, the Committee received some powerful evidence. The evidence submitted by the business sector does not support the arguments deployed by Conservative Members that the introduction of parental leave and family friendly employment policies generally will inhibit business activity and efficiency.

We have already heard my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth speak of the CBI's support for the policy. The CBI representative told the Select Committee that:

"We welcome the introduction of the Parental Leave Directive. We welcome the intention behind it which is to ensure that there is a better balance created between the legitimate needs of employees to spend time with their young children and the needs of businesses to be able to run themselves in an efficient way."

He told the Committee that the CBI would be

"taking initiatives throughout the autumn and winter this year to try and persuade our members to make sure they have got proper policies in place to ensure that the family-friendly leave rights get off to a good start."

That is a resounding welcome for the Labour Government's policies, which the Conservatives suggest are unfriendly to business.

The evidence submitted to the Committee by, I believe, the representative of Federation of Small Businesses was that:

"there are some obvious benefits to employers as well as some obvious costs. The benefits, as have already been discussed, relate to reductions in turnover of staff and to reductions in staff absenteeism. I would particularly point to the time off for domestic emergencies or family emergencies right . . . I think that is the one that will lead to the key reductions in absenteeism."

He added that there would inevitably be costs to businesses in dealing with employees being away for a period of time, but said:

"I think businesses accept that cost and they recognise that it can be balanced by the potential benefits."

The evidence from another business organisation, the Institute of Directors was, therefore, rather puzzling. It told us that 76 per cent. of its members were opposed to the introduction of parental leave and that half of its members would adjust their employment policies to take account of the introduction of parental leave. Every time that there has been some improvement in social conditions through legislation—the introduction of maternity pay or of equal pay—organisations such as the Institute of Directors have said that it would be the end of civilisation as we know it and that it would cause considerable unemployment.

We are not unused to the fact that the Institute of Directors—which was so loved by the previous Government—is often out of line with other business organisations, such as the CBI. Nevertheless, the Select Committee was concerned to discover the basis of the rather powerful statement that three quarters of IOD members opposed the introduction of parental leave and family friendly employment policies. We asked an institute representative about the evidence on which that statement was based. It turned out that the institute had sent questionnaires to every one of its 50,000 members, of whom 2,500 had responded. That amounts to a non-response rate of 95 per cent. When Committee members suggested that that was a little disappointing, even for a postal survey, the Institute of Directors representative said that she considered it to be an "excellent" response rate.

Hon. Members should recognise that, while 3.5 per cent. of IOD members oppose the introduction of parental leave and family friendly policies, the remainder either support those policies or did not think that the matter was sufficiently important to respond. Only 2.5 per cent. of members said that they would make a negative change to their practices if such policies were introduced.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting use of statistics. I presume that he derives no comfort from opinion poll evidence that is produced in the newspapers every week and which relies on pitifully small samples of the British public. The hon. Gentleman would undoubtedly deride the findings that 99.99 per cent. of the British people think that the Government are doing a lousy job.

Mr. Pond: The hon. Gentleman obviously reads a very limited range of public opinion surveys. The majority of polls that I have seen suggest that the people are happy with the Government and their policies. They are certainly happier than they were under the previous Government—or would be if the Conservatives were to form a new Government.

If opinion survey firms wished to maintain any integrity at all, they would not publish survey results based on a 95 per cent. non-response rate. One does not have to be a statistician to understand that basic point. Unfortunately, much of previous Government policy was driven by supposed "evidence" derived from those sorts of surveys.

We face a considerable challenge. The Prime Minister has set the Government the challenge of eliminating child poverty over two decades. No other Government ever

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made a commitment of that sort—in fact, no Government were prepared to acknowledge that child poverty existed. However, this Government not only acknowledge that the problem exists but will take the measures necessary to deal with it. The policies that we are discussing today are as important in tackling the problem of child poverty as increasing child benefit and introducing the working families tax credit and the national minimum wage.

We must ensure that social policy is employment friendly. That is why the welfare to work approach is so important. We must make sure that people are active citizens who use their energies and abilities to build a better life for them and their families. We must ensure also that employment policy is family friendly. If we achieve both parts of the equation, we will advance society and do a great favour to those families who find it difficult to strike a balance at present.

As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said, the Social Security Committee studied the implications of introducing parental leave in its current form and considered whether there was a case for introducing it on a paid basis. Hon. Members will be aware that the Government have gone some way towards introducing payment for parental leave. We have given those on low incomes real access to that right. Support will be available to low-income families to use parental leave when they already qualify for working families tax credit, housing benefit or certain other benefits and to receive income support in the process. That is very welcome and it flies in the face of the accusation of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton that the Government do not take seriously the need to ensure that the right is accessible to those on low incomes. As we have heard, it is expected that about 1,000 people a year will take advantage of the right at a modest cost of £1.5 million.

The Government have said that they will monitor the take-up of parental leave across gender and income groups to see what more needs to be done. I hope that they will consider carefully, as I know that they will, the report of the Social Security Committee to see whether there is a case for introducing a flat-rate payment—that is the preferred option of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) and is included in the report—or whether we could use the system of tax credits. That proposal has been advocated effectively by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham and is also favoured by the Low Pay Unit. We should consider whether the latter option could extend payment, at a modest cost, to low-income families.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West also mentioned the parenting deficit and the fact that we must find a way of ensuring that families on low incomes are able to make an investment in their children. Labour and Opposition Members have made it clear that society as a whole would reap considerable benefit from a relatively modest short-term investment in ensuring that working families with children are able to take up the new rights that the Government have introduced. I welcome the introduction of those rights, and I know that the Government will consider ways in which they can be developed further to make them even more effective.

1.32 pm

Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Canning Town): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this important debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) pointed out that the Government have set a framework to allow their positive policies to be introduced. When I was a lay official in the fire service, I tried to negotiate appropriate child care arrangements for firefighters. Much like the people in this place, they do not work in the most family friendly environment, either when they are at the sharp end on operational duty or when they are in the workplace. The nature of their job requires shift work.

It was a particularly difficult task to try to ensure that child care resources and financial support were made available to firefighters. We were very lucky in that we worked with predominantly Labour-controlled local authorities that were very progressive and friendly, so we pioneered some of the best child care arrangements at that time for workers in the emergency services. However, we received very little support from the then Government. I shall come back to the measures that have been introduced since then.

This Government's most important family friendly employment policy—the one that marks us out as entirely different from the previous Administration—is that which tackles unemployment. The previous Government were happy to preside over more than 3 million people on the dole, with all the implications that that had for families—grinding poverty, tension, stress, higher suicide rates, family break-ups and repossessions. We name the problems; unemployment causes them. That policy was not incidental. Many people believe that it was a positive, deliberate act by the Conservative party to ensure that we had mass unemployment and a low-skill, low-wage economy. That was their economic strategy. We are reversing that—we have introduced the new deal.

The OECD report on the tax burden has already been mentioned. One reason for the blip in the tax take for 1997-98 was the move to self-assessment, which was always going to create an anomalous surge in the amount of tax paid. The Conservatives opposed the new deal, which has brought hundreds of thousands of jobs, predominantly to young people. That is supporting families and ensuring that people can live in dignity and relative prosperity.

Families are supported if Britain plc is prosperous, if we have a sound economy and if people have a fair system in which to work. Society maintains its cohesiveness best if people are settled and prosperous, living with dignity in decent homes and being paid decent wages. The alternative, as we saw when we had 3 million-plus unemployed, is social division, rioting and the rise of extremists, which was shown when the British National party won elections in the east end. It is not family friendly if people do not have work and there is no employment. We are creating a prosperous Britain with decent skills and wage levels. We are clearly the one-nation party.

The Conservatives are in a mess. They opposed our extra expenditure for the public services, including £40 billion for health and education. They called that reckless, yet they recently said that they were prepared to spend an extra £11 billion, which works out at 6p on the basic rate of income tax. We are trying to make Britain

prosperous by supporting companies and providing employment opportunities. Corporation tax is down to 30 per cent. For smaller companies it will be cut to just 10 per cent. in due course.

There is also the Small Business Service. Most people know that small and medium-sized enterprises are the engine room for employment in the UK. We have introduced new rights in the workplace through the Employment Relations Act 1999, which will create a better, more stable, friendlier workplace, helping to reduce absenteeism and stress. If people are not stressed at work, they do not take stress home with them. That can only help to maintain a better family environment.

Some of the Government's recent policies to support the family have already been mentioned. Halving the income tax bill for 1.8 million people by introducing a new 10p rate will clearly assist families, as will the reduction of the basic rate of income tax to 22p. The pay rise that 2 million people received through the introduction of the statutory minimum wage can only be good for families. Parents having money in their pocket that they can spend on their family will help to keep families together. It is when pressures become intolerable that stress overtakes personal relationships.

Mr. Healey: Does my hon. Friend agree that of all the family friendly measures that have been discussed this morning, the national minimum wage affects the largest number of families and family incomes, with 2 million people benefiting from its introduction on 1 April?

Mr. Fitzpatrick: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The statutory minimum wage is our blunt instrument to help families, just as unemployment was the blunt instrument the Conservatives used to drive the economy. Allied to that, the working families tax credit will ensure that families at the lower end of the earnings league table will be given a better break in due course. We are also helping families with disabled children with £37 extra a week.

The record rise in child benefit is also a major factor in helping parents and keeping families together. The introduction of the first-ever national child care strategy is another important part of addressing the pressures on working parents. The £540 million sure start programme to co-ordinate child care, nursery education, family learning and primary health initiatives is obviously an important commitment from the Government, showing that family friendly policies are at the centre of their programme.

Mr. Healey: Will my hon. Friend use sure start as a way of confirming that the innovation that characterises all the Government's family friendly policies is co-operation between Departments? The Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment are working closely together on sure start in ways that have never been seen before. That is a signal of the concerted effort that the Government are making to support families, especially low-income families.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. "Joined-up government" may be a cliché, but sure start is a practical example of joined-up government working, supporting the Government in their determination to encourage and introduce more family friendly policies, especially in respect of employment.

Several colleagues have spoken at length on the last two subjects that I shall mention. The first is parental leave. It has been argued that the fact that such leave is unpaid might disadvantage those at the lower end of the income scale; but its introduction is, in itself, to the Government's credit, and shows that we are moving in the right direction.

Mr. Healey: On the introduction of parental leave, will my hon. Friend pay tribute not only to the Government, but to both sides of industry in the United Kingdom and in Europe? As a result of the social partner dialogue that helped to develop the principles and details of this measure, they deserve as much credit for the introduction of parental leave as do the Government for their readiness to bring it into UK law.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, because obviously it is very much to industry's credit, and it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the role played by both sides of industry.

The Confederation of British Industry has congratulated the Government on many of their policies. That is no surprise, because the people of this country think of the Labour party as the one-nation party. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) cast doubt on whether we should believe opinion polls. I am happy to believe the opinion poll results that were reported in this morning's *Daily Telegraph*, which puts the Government 27 points ahead of the Opposition. We are the one-nation party, while the Conservatives are sliding inexorably further into extremist policies. The CBI supports the Government, and I am sure that the British people support us, too.

1.43 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I have just struck out my first sentence. I was going to say how honest and good-natured the debate had been, with really good speeches on what is always, for every working parent and every person who has dependants—who may be elderly—a very difficult area: balancing their work life with their family responsibilities. Until the last speech, all the speeches had added to our understanding, as parliamentarians, of that issue.

I warmly welcome the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, who will reply to the debate. He will be given the opportunity to reinforce his credentials—I am under no illusion about his new responsibilities. I very much look forward to his speech, not least because he has given us hope and encouragement that he will seek clarification, especially from the Treasury, on many of the points that we have raised.

I have a strong sense of the pot calling the kettle black in this place this morning. Parliament is not an institution that sets a good example of family friendly employment policies. The fact that it is my five-year-old's birthday party this afternoon, and that he will have to make do with a bought-in "Bug's Life" cake from the local supermarket, is an illustration of the endless compromise that is the practical reality of every working parent.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Will the hon. Lady accept our good wishes for her child's fifth birthday?

Mrs. Spelman: I thank the hon. Lady. That may compensate slightly for the fact that my son cannot have

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his first wish, which was to have a bonfire cake, the recipe for which I shall be glad to share with her on a separate occasion.

I wonder whether we can legislate for the good will in the workplace that would enable employees always to meet the family responsibilities that sometimes lies heavily on their hearts. In this place, the ability to be there when it matters for one's family depends on the understanding of the Whips Office. I place on record my appreciation to our Whips Office for the times that it has assisted me when I needed to be away for family reasons. That encourages a good attitude in the relations between the Whips Office and its charges.

Mr. Leigh: Is our Whips Office equally fair to men who want to spend time with their children?

Mrs. Spelman: I have great pleasure in telling my hon. Friend that, under the ethos that one good turn deserves another, when I was given the opportunity to go and hear a child performing in a school play, and I made that known, I made it possible on another day for one of my male colleagues to do the same. That is an example of the way in which attitudes are changing without the need for cast-iron legislation.

For most people, a family friendly attitude at work depends on their employers knowing their circumstances, valuing them as human beings and being prepared to be flexible because they are good and valued employees. Sometimes we do not help ourselves when we hide our real motives for wanting a concession, out of pride, machismo or embarrassment. Learning to be more honest and to ask for what is needed to sustain family life would help to change the culture.

Will forcing such a change through legislation bring about the same result, or will it reinforce a rights-based culture in which employee and employer insist rigidly on their rights, ignoring any difficulties that that might cause the other? Insisting on our rights as working parents may upset those without children or elderly dependants, who have to fill in during our absence.

The loss of good will may be a retrograde step. I am reminded of how unsuccessful the Child Support Agency is at forcing through a sense of family responsibility where that has failed. Most hon. Members would acknowledge that an alarmingly large percentage of their surgery cases involve the bad experiences that parents have had in dealing with the CSA when the sense of family responsibility has broken down. Insistence on new rights may lead to an increasing number of tribunal cases where what is supposed to be statutory will be in dispute.

Opposition should be constructive, and in the debate we heard various suggestions for making the new employment policies more family friendly. Several of the ideas could be helpful, but others need refining. The focus may be too easily directed towards the tensions between child rearing and working.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) was at pains to point out, we forget older members of families—who can be adversely affected by modern working practice—at our peril. Greater job mobility and the increasing number of dual-career marriages often put elderly family members in a disadvantaged position, whereas, in the past, grandparents often lived under the same roof as their children and grandchildren. Today, more of them live alone or in residential care. We face the prospect of VAT being charged on care services, which would add another burden. I urge the Minister to do as he has promised and seek clarification because the threat of a granny tax, or whatever we might like to call it, will cause families real concern.

Trying to regulate the informal arrangements under which a grandparent may be on hand to look after grandchildren will heap even more pressure on an inter-generational relationship that is becoming increasingly scarce. In advocating the child care role for members of the family, the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), said that

"relatives, including grandparents, can register as child minders . . . Clearly, there must be a business relationship".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 9 February 1999; c. 83.]

I find that difficult to understand and my mother-in-law, when asked to turn our informal arrangements for helping out with my children into a business relationship, would find it an extraordinary suggestion—one, I fear, unlikely to encourage her to carry out that role for me more often.

Naturally, much of our focus has been on the working parent. The Government have to support the institution of the family, which is clearly under strain. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) mentioned a number of indices on which our country is sadly lagging far behind many comparable developed nations—it has the highest number of family breakdowns, divorces and teenage pregnancies in western Europe. That is nothing to be proud of, but something we urgently need to address. My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) put a strong case for the great need to buttress the institution of marriage to help to sustain family life.

The key factors are simplicity in legislation, flexibility and fairness, but how fair will the introduction of unpaid parental leave be? The highest paid will grab the opportunity for free time because they can afford to do so, but that luxury will not be available to the less well paid. The hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly)—who, for reasons we perfectly understand, has had to leave the debate early—is on record, in the Social Security Committee report, as arguing that

"if unpaid, leave is unlikely to be taken up in sufficient quantities to make a real difference to people's lives and is highly unlikely to be taken up by single parents, the low-paid or fathers."

My concern is that the Government's proposals will create a two-tier system, which is highly undesirable, and that that will produce resentment in the workplace.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Can the hon. Lady help me? We have been exploring several points across the Chamber. From her remarks and those of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), we get the impression that they recognise the need for parental leave, although they seem to think that the system will become two tier. Therefore, they appear to be arguing for paid parental leave. That is the only logic that my hon. Friends and I are able to detect. Will she clarify whether she supports paid parental leave?

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Lady has already had a chance to make a speech and has intervened a number of

times in the speeches of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The point at issue is that her party is in government and introduced the legislation. Labour Members are always keen to point out to the Opposition that they have every intention of being in government for a long time. It should therefore not surprise the hon. Lady that the electorate are far more interested in what the Government intend to do with their legislation and how it will directly affect them than in speculation about what a future Government of a different persuasion might do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: We have had lengthy exchanges on this point and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton said, we are actively engaged in looking at how the directive is applied in other European countries. If the Government are reconsidering the unfair aspects of unpaid leave, I invite them to look closely at those other European models, as the interpretation of the directive varies considerably among member states.

Mr. Pond: Will the hon. Lady give way on the subject of the models in other European countries?

Mrs. Spelman: I am not in a position to explain in detail how the policies in other European countries work because we have only just started to examine them. The variation in the way in which other member states handle the issue is huge and it would be wholly inappropriate for an Opposition spokesman, who has not yet completed examination of the application of those policies in other countries, to judge the relative merits of what is done elsewhere.

Mr. Pond: I thank the hon. Lady for her generosity in giving way again. We understand the difficulty of Opposition spokesmen. As she said, it is likely to be some time before they are in a position to make policy changes. However, the House wants to know their current view about paid parental leave. Do they support the principle of introducing it and the argument that it should be paid? That is all that we are asking. We accept that Conservative policy may change by the next election—from what I have heard today, it seems to have changed since Sunday. We simply want to know the position here and now.

Mrs. Spelman: If the hon. Gentleman really thinks that that is what ordinary people are most concerned about, I invite him to my surgery in Chelmsley Wood tomorrow morning, when I shall see at least two constituents who are interested in what the Government will do because they are insufficiently well paid to take leave. Much as I should like them to be more interested in what my party is doing, the fact remains that they want to know what the Government are doing on that issue.

We have made our position perfectly clear, and I shall reiterate it: we would prefer the directive to be applied voluntarily. We are examining how other countries deal with it, and all Conservative Members will share the information about how it works in other countries.

I wish to deal with another two-tier aspect of the Government's decision. It is highly topical and arises from a decision yesterday by the Secretary of State to limit to four weeks the amount of parental leave that can be taken in one year by those who work for a small business. Is not that simply recognition by the Government that voluntary agreements would have been much better? In practice, it means that a mother who works for a small, local firm will be penalised because she will be able to take only four weeks in one year, whereas her equivalent who commutes to the City and works for a large corporation will be able to take the full three months leave en bloc.

Dr. Howells: The hon. Lady makes a good point, but does she realise that, if all employers were good employers, a voluntary system would work, and those four weeks would be topped up by every firm in the country. We must have a statutory requirement because far too many employers will not enter into any arrangement, let alone a voluntary one.

Mrs. Spelman: We have heard plenty of evidence of good practice—Labour Members have given examples of voluntary agreements that have worked. If we analysed the logic of the Minister's argument, we might both agree that, if the law makes a distinction between a small and a large business, we may be making a rod for our own backs. When the threshold is established, there will be a cluster of cases just on the wrong side of that line. People will dispute a decision that they are not eligible for a benefit that a slightly larger firm can give them.

We welcome the simplification of maternity leave. As the Institute of Directors has been quoted in this debate, it is only fair to put on record the fact that it has supported sensible measures to help women to cope with maternity. As it says, the extension of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks

"has the virtue of simplifying the existing maternity regulations."

Many businesses have found the regulations difficult to operate.We have not heard much about the cost attached to these measures. It is important to note that, according to the IOD, the additional four weeks will cost business a further £16 million. None the less, it supports the measure, and it is important to get that across.

My concern is a purely practical one. The reduction in the qualifying period for maternity leave may not enhance the attractiveness of taking on female employees. These days, many people change their jobs every few years. In the first year of their employment, they are inevitably a burden on the organisation while they learn the ropes and serve their apprenticeship. By the second year, they contribute fully to the organisation, and are able to pull their weight. It is only in the third year that they are able to innovate and add new dimensions to the job. If a women takes maternity leave in her first year, it may make her subsequent career progression difficult. Pregnancies may happen by accident, but it is important to encourage women to plan for their maternity as a sensible part of their career progression. Insisting on full maternity rights after one year will make employers a little more wary of engaging women of child-bearing age.

Encouraging more women to work, and to come off welfare is not necessarily a family friendly policy unless there is adequate child care provision. Many women object to that policy because of the difficulty of finding an adequate substitute for their welcoming smile at the school gate. What happens in school holidays? Taking a job at the supermarket check-out, working from nine to five 48 weeks of the year, does not sit well with school

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hours. I strongly urge the Government to undertake an audit of child care provision after school and in school holidays. The logical consequence of encouraging women to work when school is not in session is that they suffer considerable stress. As mothers and employees, they try to balance those tensions.

During the most recent school holidays, a small survey of my constituents revealed that after-school provision was entirely inadequate. Although kids clubs operated during the school term, paradoxically there was no after-school care during the holidays. It is a chicken-and-egg situation: we are encouraging parents to return to work without making sufficient provision for their children at that difficult time.

Mr. Healey: Earlier, I mentioned a report from the Department for Education and Employment, which was published last month. It refers to term-time working, and the business practices that have made that increasingly common. The hon. Lady may wish to acquire a copy: the reference number is RR136.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful information. Strictly speaking, education policy is outside my brief, but I will look at the document with great interest.

The provision of after-school child care and child care during school holidays has cost implications, but they must be weighed against what happens to children who are not catered for during the holidays, and who may be out on the streets. I know from observation, and from practical experience, that working women have real difficulty in finding cover at such times.

The working families tax credit has an aspect that is certainly not family friendly. It penalises two-parent, single-earner families, and has a built-in incentive for parents not to care for their children at home. Combined with the abolition of the married couples tax allowance, it makes full-time motherhood a distinctly less attractive option. I do not think that any mother in the House would deny that full-time motherhood is more than a full-time job.

Mr. Pond: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: I have already given way a fair amount, and we have already had an extensive debate on the working families tax credit; but, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to refute my claim that two-parent, single-earner families are disadvantaged by his Government's proposals, I should like to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Pond: The hon. Lady said that the working families tax credit discriminated against households in which both parents were working, and went on to say that she wished to encourage one parent to stay at home. Will she clarify that? I find it rather confusing.

Mrs. Spelman: Perhaps there is some misunderstanding. Two-parent families are disadvantaged when they contain a single earner.

Mr. Healey *rose—*

Mrs. Spelman: We have had a fair number of exchanges about the working families tax credit, and I do want to hear from the Minister.

Times have changed. Many more women now work and are rising to higher levels in the workplace. That has been brought about by equal educational opportunities and more enlightened attitudes on the part of employers. It is important to see this development as part of an historical continuum. Working women well recall the time when they had to leave work when they married. In this context, attitudes should not be defined in party political terms; these are simple historical facts about the changing culture of British society.

The business culture is also changing. In today's increasingly competitive world, it is the quality of the human resource that makes the competitive difference. The globalisation of the marketplace will produce large international companies, often with common products. The difference will be down to the quality of the team. As the skills are more highly valued, employees will make more efforts to recruit—and, most important, to retain—their employees. That will necessarily entail accommodating their need, as well-rounded human beings, to meet their family responsibilities. I doubt whether we can force the change of culture by legislation, but the fact that success will depend on a balanced life style for the work force is beginning to be expressed in the marketplace. That, like educational opportunity in the past, is much more likely to be the engine of change. For all the talk about technology, which will undoubtedly be an enabler, the key differentiator will be how well a company treats its employees.

The changes in employment policy are classic examples of legislation driven by ideology. The Government have not thought through the practical behaviour of people and how they respond to a strict, dare I say ungenerous, interpretation of the law. In business terms, the employment policy would be defined as an input policy. It fails to define the outcomes that it is intended to achieve. My prediction is that those employment policies will end up failing families because legislation, in itself, is insufficient to change behaviour.

2.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Dr. Kim Howells): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). It is the first time that I have sat opposite her in a debate and heard her speak. She made a couple of important points. She made a good point about inadequate child care facilities during school holidays, which is a problem that many of us have been concerned with for quite a while. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is particularly concerned about it. I am sure that the hon. Lady has read of some of the initiatives that he has started, including reading clubs at football grounds, which are aimed at young boys. Holiday provision has been a difficult problem.

I do not think that anyone in the Chamber would disagree with the hon. Member for Meriden: of course we need a cultural change. I am reminded of the old arguments about the Race Relations Act 1976 and equal opportunities. Opponents of the measures always said that we did not really need them; there were cultural changes that people would somehow evolve into at some stage. That is true, but I take the hon. Lady back to one of the

greatest politicians who ever graced the Chamber, Winston Churchill, who said in 1909 that, if we did not have a statutory floor,

"the good employer is undercut by the bad and the bad employer is undercut by the worst."

That is the point that we are making.

As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) knows, I have a lot of time for her, but she showed a disappointingly crabby approach to the measures, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) described brilliantly. He said that they try to facilitate the means by which individuals can play a constructive part in employment and in the most vital task that any of us can take on: raising children and helping them to develop into balanced, fulfilled adults. The importance of that truism was made clear by hon. Members on both sides of the House, particularly the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who gave us much to think about in his short but valuable contribution.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton has a proper role to play. She is there to oppose the Government and long may she do so. She raised a number of issues. We could probably debate them all day, but I am particularly concerned about her point about the new deal for lone parents. I have managed to get hold of the latest statistics.

A total of 18,260 lone parents had found employment to the end of July 1999—an increase of 2,150, or 13 per cent. in July alone. In addition to the job outcomes, 5,200 lone parents have taken up education and training opportunities while on the new deal. As a former Minister with responsibility for lifelong learning, that is music to my ears, and I know that the people who have taken up those opportunities will feel the same. We have not had a chance to talk much about lifelong learning and education. Many people are being offered a chance that they might not otherwise have had, and the results are very good.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) advised us to monitor take-up rates for parental leave. As I said, the Government will heed that advice and take careful note of what happens as these opportunities are made available.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—the distinguished chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security—made a thoughtful and constructive contribution. At one point, he described himself as being above the rough and tumble of politics. Hearing a Liberal Democrat Member say that is a bit like hearing Jonah Lomu declare that he does not enjoy trampling over English wingers, but he keeps finding he has no choice but to do it.

Mr. Kirkwood: Not just the English.

Dr. Howells: I forgot that the hon. Gentleman is Scottish. In any event, he raised a number of important issues. I should like to congratulate him, on behalf of us all, on the Select Committee's report—it is terrific. It will be a great quarry for us as we construct policies in the future. I hope that everybody will take the opportunity to read it, as it is one of the best Select Committee reports to be published in a long time, on this or any subject.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the problems faced by those on difficult council estates and difficult projects in Scotland, a subject that is close to my heart. I want the hon. Gentleman to know that the Government are co-ordinating a family friendly employment campaign to promote good working practices. A number of Departments are involved, led by the Department for Education and Employment. We are considering how to promote policies according to the different needs of employers and employees. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that those needs are very different.

The family friendly employment policies will help reduce pressure on families, especially at critical times—when a child is born, for example. I hope that the policies will strengthen family life, along with the other support that we are giving to all families.

As for supporting marriage, the Home Office is working on what it refers to as—I hate this expression—a marriage pack. I wish that someone had given me one in December 1967. Registrars will be able to give it to all couples getting married. It will include information about marriage support services, legal rights and marriage responsibilities. Perhaps we have taken too much for granted and assumed that people somehow know all that information. It is an interesting initiative.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire also drew attention to the work-home balance in the national health service. Few sectoral focuses can be more important; we need the NHS badly. There is a great deal of potential out there, and we need more nurses in the health service. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health launched "Working Together". It contains three strategic aims for the NHS—to have enough staff with the right skills in the right places, to improve staff's working lives and to develop the capacity and capability to deal more successfully with issues arising at home. Last month, Health Ministers announced a major campaign called "Improving Working Lives in the NHS". I think that due consideration has been given to this issue, and I hope that we can make some progress—there is a great deal of determination to do so.

I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) has also had to leave. As the hon. Member for Meriden said, Fridays are difficult. My hon. Friend gave us the benefit of his knowledge on the important and interesting research being done on small and medium-sized enterprises, and the balance between home and work. He gave us a valuable personal insight into the difficulties faced by single parents—in his case, male. As someone with three children, I find the thought of caring for eight, as he has, mind-boggling.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman had several wives, though.

Dr. Howells: However many wives, it is mind-boggling. I appreciated the helpful contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Putney.

The hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) has also had to leave. He said that he initiated the first debates on family friendly policies back in 1978, 1981 and 1982. Churlishly, I was about to say that we had not made much progress until now, but I know that he cares passionately about these issues. He made some interesting points. He often has a different way of looking at these things from most of us, to say the least. However, his views are always interesting.

The hon. Gentleman advocated the award of a lump sum to parents as a recognition that we have a new citizen among us when a child is born. He talked about £500 to

[Dr. Howells]

£1,000 being the right sum for the new citizen, but I was not sure whether he was saying that that should pay for time off to look after the new baby. Perhaps he could let us know later. He talked of the need for Parliament to view these matters with a life cycle perspective. He argued that we should not break up people's lives into segments that are convenient for us, but try to see them overall. He warned the Government not to be mean when money is needed most. I can remember us telling the previous Government that on I do not know how many occasions, but it is a good point. When we look back on our lives, there are times when we could have done with some extra money. Not all of us are fortunate enough to have had the salary of MPs. Any Government should examine that perspective carefully.

The hon. Member for Worthing, West said that we must be careful to view such policies and initiatives in as long a perspective as we can manage. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Lorna Fitzsimons) also stressed that perspective and reminded us that the great decisions taken in this Chamber must make sense to ordinary people in terms of how they affect their lives. She noted that that goes for our commercial enterprises as well, and that there is a hard economic cost to employers in not being family friendly. That was perhaps the most contentious issue, but I know how profligate employers in my area have been in taking on employees, male or female, making them into skilled productive workers and then sacking them for ludicrous reasons. The most shameful of them is sacking a female employee for having a child. Such employers are more profligate than the Government: someone learns a job and is moved on. It takes a long time to pick up such skills.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman is doing very well.

Dr. Howells: I do not think that I can have made much of an impact if the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire can describe me as a Department for Education and Employment Minister. I must have visited his constituency in a former life.

I fully endorse the importance of the long-term perspective. We are trying to work with the grain on this one. We have consulted, and taken advice from, the best firms, large and small, on how they have gone about best business practice. We must listen carefully as we take the initiatives forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale also said that we must be careful with deadlines, particularly the rules that will apply to children born or adopted on or after 15 December, in line with the directive. We are considering that point carefully. It will ensure that the demand for parental leave builds up slowly, and that employers' good will is maximised. We must be extremely careful about the matter. We want the good will of employers; we want to bring them along with us. We do not want to impose the type of regulatory burden that some hon. Members have highlighted.

On that point, I turn to the contribution of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). Incidentally, I was not sure whether there was a Sale, West—when I went to play rugby in Sale, it did not seem that big, but I suppose there must be a west and an east. The hon. Gentleman quite properly drew attention to the possibility of additional regulatory burdens. That matter must be taken seriously, and the Government do take it seriously. I do not know what occurred under the previous Government, but a type of inquisition descends on every Department—the regulatory impact assessment. There is no legislation and no regulations that are not tested against that rigorous assessment—believe me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) expressed the aims at the heart of family friendly employment policies. Interestingly, he reminded us that we should consider mounting a powerful publicity campaign to ensure that everybody knew about those policies. I could not agree more. I shall give that message, loud and clear, to the DTI and the DFEE. We already publish a range of booklets on employment legislation, updating and so on, but that is not enough; we must go much further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) made it crystal clear that there are no certainties in human relationships. Nothing could be truer than that—I know that from personal experience. My hon. Friend added something else. The hon. Member for Gainsborough made the same point—I said that it was a thoughtful observation—that we should be careful not to have a rose-tinted image of what life might have been like at some time in history. Hon. Members seem to be getting younger, but I dare say that some them—like me—are old enough to remember well generations of women whose talent was stunted by lack of opportunity. There was no escape; there was no key—either voluntary or statutory—and we must remember that. I certainly cannot remember a golden age. I remember a time when there were fewer divorces—perhaps that was good—but there were also more battered wives, and potential never had a chance to express itself. Let us remember that along with any rose-tinted memories that we might have.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) gave us the benefit of his great experience in these matters. He reinforced a point made by many other hon. Members in the debate: as social mores and patterns of employment change, so we, in government, have a duty to ensure that legislation is appropriate and relevant, and that it will benefit society.

I do not want to add a sour note, but my hon. Friend highlighted the bankruptcy of the views of those sitting on the Opposition Front Bench. We asked for answers—we received none. I hope that, for all our sakes, the Opposition will come up with some answers. We need an Opposition, and they are likely to get wiped out at the next election with that type of policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) properly highlighted the fact that families at the bottom of the earnings league will be helped by the national minimum wage, by the working families tax credit, by sure start and by all our other initiatives. He stressed the need—as did other hon. Members—to extend and encourage such examples of joined-up government. I make it clear to him and to all right hon. and hon. Members in the Chamber that all Departments are working hard to ensure that we have a joined-up approach to this matter. We realise its importance and hope that all Members of the House—whether Tories, Liberal Democrats or anyone else—will do so too, so that we can go forward constructively together.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Essex Rivers Health Care Trust

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am pleased to have the opportunity to draw the House's attention to the achievements of, and the threat to, the maternity services in the north Essex town of Halstead and the villages that run along the Colne river valley. That area is administered by the Essex Rivers health care trust.

I am supported in this matter by the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst), who represents the area with me and whose duties as Deputy Speaker prevent him from speaking in the debate. Nevertheless, both the right hon. Gentleman and I attended and addressed a demonstration rally in Halstead, which was supported by hundreds of local people, predominantly those who have given birth to children in the local birthing unit or under the care of the local maternity service.

I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), knows the area. I understand that her children were born in the W J Courtauld hospital, Braintree, which I also have the honour to represent.

It is worth reflecting on the principles behind maternity care as set out in Baroness Cumberlege's 1993 report, "Changing Childbirth". The principles and criteria contained therein were accepted by the then Government and have been accepted by the current Government as setting the standard that should appertain to maternity services. The principles are that:

"The woman must be the focus of maternity care. She should be able to feel that she is in control of what is happening to her and be able to make decisions about her care, based on her needs, having discussed matters fully with the professionals involved.

Maternity services must be readily and easily accessible to all. They should be sensitive to the needs of the local population and based primarily in the community.

Women should be involved in the monitoring and planning of services to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of a changing society. In addition care should be effective and resources used efficiently."

There is serious concern about proposals emerging from the health care trust to change the method of delivering maternity services to mothers in Halstead and the neighbouring villages. Halstead is a small market town in north Essex; it is somewhat distant from the main town that serves its health needs, Colchester, and it has its own small hospital, which would once have been called a cottage hospital and which is greatly supported by local people. The Friends of Halstead Hospital has raised £52,000 to establish a birthing unit at the hospital and that is the focus of the current midwife-led maternity service.

That service is known as the valley service, named after the Colne valley in Essex—not to be confused with the Yorkshire haunts of Victor Grayson. The service was set up three years ago to demonstrate that the principles of "Changing Childbirth" could be applied in small towns and rural areas. It has been a resounding success, but that success has, in some ways, laid a dangerous path for it.

It might help the House if I outline the maternity services process followed in Halstead and the valley villages. When a woman believes she is pregnant, she goes to see a local general practitioner; if the pregnancy is confirmed, the GP notifies Colchester general hospital. That hospital then sends the details of the expectant mother to the valley midwife team based at Halstead.

Completely following "Changing Childbirth" criteria, the valley team allocate a named midwife who acts with her partner midwife so that someone is always on call. The named midwife contacts the expectant mother at her home, not at a clinic. She takes the mother's history and gives appropriate advice about maternity services and what she can expect, and carries out ante-natal checks. The expectant mother is then given the choice that every expectant mother should have of where her baby is to be born: at home, in the birthing centre at Halstead hospital or in the general hospital in Colchester. The course of ante-natal care will be directed to suit that choice.

Ante-natal care is based on home visits, not clinic visits. The named midwife gives the expectant mother her telephone number, mobile phone number and pager number. Thus, the expectant mother can contact the named midwife or her partner any time, 24 hours a day.

On going into labour, the expectant mother contacts her named midwife, whom she knows well by that time. The midwife goes to the expectant mother's home and makes an assessment of whether labour has progressed to the point where delivery may be expected. The purpose of the home visit and the early check is to avoid premature or false admissions to hospital. That has two advantages: it avoids unnecessary anxiety for the expectant mother and the cost of travelling sometimes long distances to the birthing unit or the hospital in a predominantly rural area.

If labour has begun, the named midwife accompanies the expectant mother to Halstead or Colchester and is with her during birth and for the period afterwards. If the mother stays in the hospital, she passes into the care of the hospital staff; if she goes home, the named midwife goes with her and carries out the post-natal care for two or four weeks.

I shall compare the valley scheme with the traditional scheme that operates in the other part of the health trust area in Colchester and the villages on the Colchester side of the district. The mother will go to her doctor, who will send her to the clinic at the Colchester hospital, where she will see the duty midwife. The mother is seen by the community nurse probably twice during her pregnancy. When she goes into labour, she will ring the labour ward of the hospital and be told to come in. If she goes to the hospital too soon, she will be sent home. If she is ready, she will be admitted and seen by whoever is available. The mother stays in the post-natal ward for two to three days. After she is discharged from hospital, post-natal visits are made for the same period as under the valley scheme but from a team of three or four midwives. To be fair, the same midwife would probably visit the mother after the birth, but that is not guaranteed in the same way as it is under the valley scheme.

The local health trust have described the system as a two-tier service and claim that the service in Halstead and the valley villages is better than that in the rest of the district. The problem with the valley scheme is its initial set-up cost, which includes the provision of cars for the midwives, mobile phones and pagers. The health trust estimates the cost of applying the better scheme to the whole district as between £90,000 and £160,000, depending on the way in which the cost is calculated.

[Mr. Alan Hurst]

After the initial costs, it appears that the midwife-led, valley scheme is more cost effective. Figures from 1998 show that a birth under the valley scheme cost £722, while a birth under the traditional scheme cost £1,200 in Colchester and £1,700 in Harwich.

I am told also that forceps delivery under the valley maternity scheme is half the rate of the traditional scheme and use of epidurals and pethidine is substantially lower. Some 20 per cent. of births take place at home or in the birthing unit, while the national figure for such births is nearer to 2 per cent. Locally, that figure has increased from 1 to 20 per cent. since the introduction of the valley scheme.

The scheme is acknowledged to be an outstanding success, even by the health trust itself. That is the problem, however, because the scheme is clearly better than the traditional scheme operating elsewhere and complies much more fully with the principles of "Changing Childbirth". However, on 4 October the local health trust board decided that

"the current two tier system was unsustainable",

and went on to say that a new uniform service would be introduced at the end of March 2000.

Councillor John Kotz, who is the leading health spokesman on Braintree district council, wrote to Mike Pollard, the chief executive of the health trust, about his concerns. I shall quote a relevant section from the chief executive's reply. He said:

"As I observed, the Trust has been placed in a position of having two differing modes of service delivery—traditional and group practice. Without additional funding of between £90,000 and £160,000, depending on how costs are calculated, 'Changing Childbirth' cannot be 'rolled out'.

The Trust therefore has a two tier service which is 'part fish and part fowl'. As the health services in North Essex are in serious financial deficit, I cannot foresee the circumstances when the 'Rolls Royce' service in the Valley can ever be extended across our entire catchment area".

The expression "Rolls-Royce service" gives cause for concern. Valley mothers obviously take the view that they are about to be offered a Skoda in part-exchange for the Rolls-Royce. The expression "Rolls-Royce service" was used about Essex during the debate on "Taking the initiative", issued by the neighbouring health trust, when I brought these matters before the House in 1998. The trust claimed that Braintree and Maldon had a better, Rolls-Royce service than Chelmsford or Colchester. The whole point of "Changing Childbirth" is that every expectant mother should have a Rolls-Royce service. Corners should not be cut to ensure that everyone receives a uniform, but lower, standard of service.

Mothers in Halstead and the valley villages are incensed by the plans. I mentioned a rally that the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden and I attended two or three weeks ago. Halstead is a very small town and the villages are even smaller. The rally was attended by hundreds of young mothers pushing prams. It was one of those autumn days when there is a deluge of rain, but I am pleased to say that, by the time that we reached the park and the petition was received, the sun had come out and feelings were much more hopeful than when we started out.

In the debate about town and country it is said that, in many ways, country areas receive fewer services, sometimes because of their very nature and their distance from towns. In this case, for once, a small town and small villages have a top-rate service. The mothers and children of Halstead and the valley villages would ask my hon. Friend the Minister to exert every possible influence to persuade the health trust that it has started well. It had high aspirations when it set up the scheme some three years ago. It must be congratulated on what it did then. It is a pity that, having marched us to the top of the hill, like the Duke of York, it has started to take us down again. I hope that it finds the necessary capital resources to ensure that everyone in the health district, including the constituents of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), enjoys the benefits that my constituents and those of the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden currently enjoy.

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Gisela Stuart): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) on securing a debate on maternity services. He has championed the cause for many years. He was right to say that I am very familiar with Halstead and the maternity services in his constituency. I have used them not once, but twice.

I am particularly pleased to have an opportunity to reply to this debate because the maternity services in the national health service have been a success story. Huge advances have been made in the past few years in changing the experience of women during pregnancy and childbirth. It is now much safer to give birth, and women are more actively involved in making decisions about the maternity care that they receive. They no longer simply have to make do with what is decided for them by others.

The overriding expectation of pregnant women, their partners, their families and those who care for them is a safe pregnancy and delivery and a healthy mother and baby. Fifty years ago, at the birth of the NHS, the maternal mortality rate was 170 per 100,000 pregnancies. A unit delivering 3,000 babies a year could expect to see five maternal deaths annually. Thankfully, that figure has been greatly reduced. A unit delivering 3,000 babies a year today might have only one maternal death every five years or so.

There have been similar safety improvements for babies. The perinatal mortality rate, which is defined as stillbirth and death within seven days of birth, has dropped from 40 per 1,000 pregnancies in 1946 to 8.1 per 1,000 in 1998. The national health service, and particularly the maternity services, can take great pride in those figures.

However, childbirth is about more than just safety. Maternity services exist to support the mother, her baby, her partner and her family. They are about helping women enjoy pregnancy and childbirth as a positive, life-enhancing experience. No one has a greater interest in a healthy baby and a happy outcome than the pregnant woman. Care must be planned and provided for her and, more importantly, in partnership with her.

There has been a culture change in the national health service. The Government are determined to put the patient first. In maternity services, the ethos of putting the woman at the centre of service planning is now widely accepted.

The Government recognise the hard work, skill and commitment of all those involved in providing maternity services. There has been considerable progress in recent years in providing a more personal, woman-centred service that is tailored to meet the health needs of the local population. Maternity services have led the way in partnership working. Midwives have played a key role, working with women and other health professionals to ensure that the maternity service provided for women by the NHS is safe and satisfying.

Since 1994, 38 development projects have been centrally funded as part of the implementation of the "Changing Childbirth" initiative. The implementation phase has ended, but the central principles enshrined in the report have become embedded in mainstream NHS maternity provision. Those principles are that care should meet the needs of the individual, should be accessible and as close to the woman's home as possible, and should be woman-focused, user-friendly and predominantly led by midwives and the women themselves.

An Audit Commission report on maternity services was published in March 1997. It found that 90 per cent. of women surveyed were pleased or very pleased with the way that they were treated during pregnancy and childbirth. That is a very high satisfaction rate, which reflects the dedication and skill of all the professionals involved in maternity care.

There is, of course, no room for complacency, and we have been building on the Audit Commission's recommendations in our wider initiatives to modernise the NHS to improve still further maternity services for women and their babies.

In many respects, maternity services have led the way in the NHS. The principles of accessible, responsive, user-focused services, evidence-based care and user involvement, which were set out in "Changing Childbirth" some years ago, are all there in the White Paper, "The New NHS".

"The New NHS" is very specific in its intention of making the health service more responsive and accountable to users. Maternity services are already leading the way with the patient-centred care that is at the heart of our plans for the national health service. Groups, such as maternity services liaison committees, which enable users to work with health professionals in developing appropriate, local services will, we hope, have a much larger part to play in future. The Department has financially supported the strengthening of maternity services liaison committees by funding a training project for user representative committee chairs. Furthermore, the Department has supported the proposal of the national perinatal epidemiology unit to set up a website for maternity services liaison committees, so that an increased interchange of information can take place.

Another strand of our modernisation programme for the NHS is to improve the support and investment that we make in NHS staff. The recent pay increases, coupled with a new innovative recruitment campaign, provide a real demonstration that we care about the future of our nurses and midwives.

Last year, £42.6 million was invested in nursing and midwifery training, and, by the end of this year, we shall have spent £50.3 million. In addition, £50 million has been allocated to expand part-time nursing and midwifery training places.

We are also attracting more people into midwifery and encouraging qualified staff back into the NHS by broadening career structures and improving the working life of staff. A £5 million nursing and midwifery recruitment campaign took place, which attracted more than 50,000 responses. A further £5 million has been allocated to support local "return to practice" initiatives. We are especially encouraged that, as a result of these campaigns, applications for midwifery courses have increased by 61 per cent. this year.

I hope that what I have said has emphasised the Government's on-going commitment to the principles of good-quality, woman-centred maternity services. Of course things are still not perfect and, inevitably, in a climate of finite resources and competing demands, difficult decisions have to be taken. However, I firmly believe that we can build on the many examples of good practice that exist throughout the country. We will make further progress through the wider initiatives that we are taking to modernise the national health service and to improve public health.

I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend's concerns about the proposals from Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS trust, and I know that these concerns are shared by the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst) and the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Mr. Hurst: I should have mentioned earlier that the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) apologises for not being here today, but he has written to me and expressed his full support for the remarks that I was to make.

Ms Stuart: I am grateful for that comment. I know that the MPs for the area have been united in their concerns on previous occasions. I always welcome and appreciate cross-party co-operation, and this is an example of true cross-party co-operation.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree will agree that we want to maintain high-quality maternity care not just for the women of Braintree, but throughout north Essex. We have a responsibility for all mothers in the area—the 80 per cent. who deliver in the large hospitals, which provide an excellent service, as well as those who deliver in smaller units or at home.

Midwives working in teams are only one way of providing good quality services. Pilots such as those described by my hon. Friend are a key way of developing maternity services for the future, not a way of setting up exclusive services for the few. Pilots are a way of learning and drawing conclusions from the experience gained, which must be adjusted to local needs and applied locally.

A further important step is local consultation, to feed in the views of everyone involved in using and providing local maternity services on the best way to spend the £3.9 million spent on the service in north-east Essex.

My hon. Friend will agree that it is vital that plans for service development are determined democratically and

[Ms Stuart]

implemented sensitively and appropriately. I am aware that North East Essex community health council has previously expressed concern that North Essex health authority has not made progress in developing a strategy for maternity services.

A north Essex strategy group has been set up to tackle some of the issues involved in achieving better quality and greater consistency in maternity services. The group is producing guidelines and protocols to determine how maternity services should work. The strategy group consists of professionals from each of the north Essex NHS trusts and the lay chairs of the three local maternity service liaison committees—MSLCs—in north Essex. The MSLCs are mixed groups of professionals and local women.

The strategy group will not take decisions on future service delivery. Rather, it will be involved in developing protocols and standard frameworks for maternity services in north Essex. A draft strategy is expected from the group by the end of 1999 and consultation will begin in the new year.

This inclusive approach recognises the important role of the newly formed primary care groups. The health authority will consult widely on its proposals. It is determined to ensure equality of access to high-quality care for all the women in the area. We expect the consultation to include not only the views of the local community. I expect that the health authority will examine successful maternity service provision in other parts of the country. There are many excellent examples of good practice that should be studied during the strategic planning process.

If the community health council contests the proposals and agreement cannot be reached locally, the matter will be referred to Ministers, who will make a decision in the light of all the circumstances. I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand that it would therefore be inappropriate for me to express an opinion on the consultation process or the substantive issues at stake. I must and will keep an open mind.

Mr. Hurst: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the health trusts concede that the Valleys scheme is the best, that should be the model for the rest of the district?

Ms Stuart: The purpose of the consultation process is to examine maternity services, the financial position of the trusts and the services to all the other users. The right balance must be struck.

I assure my hon. Friend that we remain fully committed to the provision of high-quality, up-to-date and responsive maternity services. We will uphold the health authority's proposals only if we are satisfied that they are in the best interests of local people.

I know that my hon. Friend has previously expressed concern about the future provision of maternity services in north Essex. He has been successful in ensuring that discussions on future service provision in his area are driving the development of the health authority's strategy for maternity services not just for his constituency, but for the whole of north Essex.

As a result of my hon. Friend's efforts, the lessons learned from the pilot schemes will be instrumental in developing options for consultation. That will ensure that services are developed equitably for all north Essex residents, recognising, as I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree, that plans for service development must be determined democratically to ensure sensitive and appropriate care of mothers, their babies and their families.

My hon. Friend can be assured that there will be no changes to existing services in north-east Essex unless and until—

The motion having been made at half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 8 November 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE BILL *[Lords]*

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*

MEDWAY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That so much of the Lords Message [4th November] as relates to the City of Newcastle upon Tyne Bill *[Lords]*, the Kent County Council Bill *[Lords]* and the Medway Council Bill *[Lords]* be now considered.

Resolved,

That this House concurs with the Lords in their Resolution.—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Territorial Army

1. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** (South-West Surrey): What is the current strength of the Territorial Army. [96122]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): On the basis of the most recently available data, the strength of the Territorial Army was some 45,000 on 1 September this year.

Mrs. Bottomley: Will the right hon. Gentleman congratulate A company of the third battalion of The Princess of W[illegible]'s Royal Regiment? In my constituency, it really took to heart what was said a year ago—that it should contribute to a "heavyweight role" rather than being simply "weekend warriors". It has 11 officers serving overseas, which includes Bosnia and Kosovo. It is, however, deeply disturbed by the lack of resources to train them. The resources and commitment that featured in the rhetoric simply have not been delivered in practice.

What response does the right hon. Gentleman intend to make, especially in the light of the Defence Committee report published today? According to that report, the Ministry of Defence will have to work very hard

"to demonstrate that the smaller TA truly is better trained than in the past, and better suited for its role in supporting the regular Army."

Mr. Hoon: I certainly congratulate the Territorial Army in the right hon. Lady's constituency, and I am confident that the proposals in the strategic defence review will contribute to its attempts to become part of an effective contribution to the regular armed forces. I have not had an opportunity to read the Select Committee report in any great detail, but I will do so and will give the right hon. Lady and the House a more detailed response in due course.

I note that the report is thoroughly well-balanced. The Committee recognises the need to monitor the level of overstretch in our armed forces. It concludes that it is too early to judge the overall health of the Territorial Army and the other reserve forces, but makes specific reference to the new reserves training and mobilisation centre at Chilwell—a place that I know very well, because it is close to my constituency. The report says that it should be regarded as having been a success so far, and that it is a valuable asset.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Secretary of State aware that there is dismay in Wales not only at the cut in numbers, but at the potential lowering of the quality of the TA's activities? Is he aware that earlier undertakings to maintain ancillary staff such as caretakers and others involved in the locations where they train have been reneged on, and that redundancies are now being made which make it difficult to keep the weaponry and stocks in those centres? Will the right hon. Gentleman now undertake to look at the figures, and to ensure that there is no reduction in quality, over and above the reduction in quantity?

Mr. Hoon: I shall examine the figures and the concerns raised by the right hon. Gentleman, but let me make it clear that the whole point of restructuring the TA is to make it more relevant and more usable, and thus to enhance the quality of its contribution to our regular forces.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): May I be the first to congratulate the right hon. Gentleman, from the Opposition Dispatch Box, on his recent appointment? We know that he must have one of the very best jobs in the Government.

Will the right hon. Gentleman reverse the damage to the TA that has occurred since the strategic defence review? It has been cut by 18,000. We were told that there would be no compulsory call-up, but the Government have changed their mind. We were told that TA members would no longer be trained as formed units, but we now hear that they are to be deployed as formed units. Given that the number of TA members volunteering to serve with the regulars has apparently halved in the past six months, and given that employers are becoming reluctant to take on TA members, will the right hon. Gentleman accept the unanimous advice of the Defence Committee

report, which was published this morning, suspend further reductions in the TA, and reconsider its post-SDR establishment size?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his good wishes, although I am not so sure about the rest of his comments. I shall not repeat the points that I have already made about the basis of the SDR in relation to the TA, but I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about compulsory mobilisation.

A Government of whom the hon. Gentleman was a strong supporter and, no doubt, proud to be a member, encouraged the passing of the Reserve Forces Act 1996. That Act allowed for the compulsory mobilisation of members of the Territorial Army—something that members of the TA have broadly welcomed, recognising that it gives them the opportunity to participate effectively in active service. I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not make the same criticism again. It is clear to me that compulsory mobilisation adds to the quality of our reserve forces, and allows them to make a much more effective contribution in the real world than they may have been able to make in the past.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his kind remarks about the Chilwell mobilisation base in my constituency, whose opening I attended. Is he aware that enthusiasm for the new task is extremely high in the base, and that those to whom I have spoken are somewhat baffled by the Conservatives' idea that it is possible to have a reserve force that turns up or does not turn up when called on, according to individual whim?

Mr. Hoon: I live close to the Chilwell base, and I know a number of people who work from there. It is my strong impression that those people welcome the changes that the Government promoted in the SDR, and want the TA to play an effective role alongside the regular forces.

Manning and Recruitment

2. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): If he will make a statement on the manning and recruitment targets for the armed forces. [96123]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar): Achievement of full manning is a key objective of the strategic defence review. The Navy expects to achieve full manning balance by April 2002, the Army by April 2005, and the RAF by April 2001. Recruiting across the three services is buoyant. The Royal Marines are having their best year since 1994, and all services report that they are on course to hit targets.

Mr. Syms: Following the SDR, we have had reductions in manpower and money for regular and reserve forces. The armed services are clearly suffering from overstretch, and the resulting pressures are causing many people to leave early. We now hear that the Government's magic solution is the recruitment of young offenders. Is it not a sad commentary on the Government and an indictment of their policy that they have to scour prisons for recruits for the next century?

Mr. Spellar: I find it surprising that the Member of Parliament representing Poole did not welcome the good figures for the Royal Marines, which are positive news for his area. Current recruitment figures are the best for a decade. That is partly due to the excellent advertising campaign, the very good recruiting being undertaken on the ground, and the clear messages being given to a range of possible audiences about the attraction of a career in the armed forces. That should be welcomed.

The hon. Gentleman made some facile comments about stories in the press today. He should welcome the fact that, when appropriate, properly selected individuals will be given a second chance in life. Allowing them to serve their country will be good for them, good for the country and good for the armed forces. I think that it is good news, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so churlish about it.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): My hon. Friend has talked about the general recruitment targets. He has also set some demanding targets for the recruitment of ethnic minorities. How are those targets being met? There are also demanding targets for the recruitment of women. What progress is being made on those targets?

Mr. Spellar: We have set a target of a 1 per cent. increase per year in recruitment from the ethnic communities. That means 3 per cent. of total recruitment this year, 4 per cent. next year and 5 per cent. the year after. The Army looks to be on course to hit those targets. The other two services may not, but the Commission for Racial Equality is enormously enthusiastic about the success that we are having and encouraged by it. All the services have run ethnic recruitment operations around the country, including some run on a tri-service basis. The ethnic recruitment teams have shown enormous enthusiasm and have achieved a good deal of success with their target audience. We do not have a target figure for the recruitment of women, but it is pleasing that 13.2 per cent. of new recruits this year are women. That is an increase in the percentage, which means that we are drawing from a larger pool to get the best of our young people for our armed forces.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Is the Minister aware that figures supplied by the House of Commons Library show that in only two of the past eight years have the targets for Army recruitment been met? Is it not clear from those figures, for which the previous Government must take some responsibility, that the failure to recruit adequately is a factor in current overstretch? In those circumstances, is it not unimaginative to reject out of hand the proposal to recruit young offenders, as long as there is no compulsion; those selected demonstrate a genuine desire to lead a more constructive life; and there is careful screening and selection?

Mr. Spellar: I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. It is unfortunate that some people have so cavalierly rejected an initiative that could give some youngsters who have taken a wrong turn in life an

opportunity to make the right turn and become useful citizens who contribute to this country. The armed forces will implement all the safeguards that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has outlined. The scheme could give people a second chance and would be good for the country, good for the services and good for the individuals.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): Will my hon. Friend send my congratulations, and those of many hon. Members, to the various recruiting departments for the innovation to which he has referred? He knows my involvement with young people, particularly in our cadet forces. What appalled me for many years was the reluctance to take on youngsters who had committed a misdemeanour in the past. Youngsters sometimes go astray because of their environment. Does my hon. Friend agree that the very structure to which those youngsters can now look forward will give them a second chance and will help them to take the path that we as a society would most welcome, rather than the alternative to which some appear willing to condemn them?

Mr. Spellar: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments, and I want to stress the restrictions and careful safeguards in the exercise. Certain offences will not be ignored. The rules were changed a few years ago to enable people who had served a limited prison sentence to join the armed forces. These proposals, which have been worked out carefully with the Prison Service, would enable those concerned to take courses to show them what life in the services would be like after they have served their sentence. That is encouraging, and shows that the armed forces are taking an imaginative approach. At the same time, it offers a real opportunity to youngsters who may have had an unstructured life to get into the structured life of the armed services, to make something of themselves and to contribute to this country. The forces are warmly to be congratulated on their initiative in this respect.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Despite the Minister's bluster, the reality is that, since the Government came to power, the commitment of Her Majesty's forces is at a level unprecedented at any time since the second world war. Even on best estimates, the level of commitment will be significantly higher than that which the Government inherited. It is not just a matter of recruitment, but of retention of service personnel—between 900 and 1,100 men are leaving the Army alone every month. The situation has got so bad that the Government have had to produce a document for service families which says:

"We want to make it easier for them to keep in touch with their families, and give them more time together when they return."

Their time spent together gets less and less because of Government policies. What are the Government going to do about it?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman should tell the House and the nation which of those commitments he would not have undertaken. Would he pull our troops from the streets of Northern Ireland? Does he think that we should not have participated in the NATO operation in Kosovo? The Opposition's foreign affairs spokesman thinks that we should not have participated in East Timor, and that we should have left our friends and allies from Australia in the lurch. Those are our commitments. When we came into office, the level of commitment was 29 per cent., which increased to 47 per cent. at its peak. It is now back down to 35 per cent. We are taking measures in Kosovo and Bosnia to reduce that level, and we are implementing a welfare package. We get no answer from the Conservatives as to which commitments they would cut and which operations they think we should not have undertaken. Theirs is a facile view, and there is no joined-up thinking between the Opposition's foreign affairs and defence spokesmen.

Procurement

3. **Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): What discussions he has had with his EU colleagues about improved co-operation in defence procurement. [96124]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and my noble Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement are in the process of meeting their European colleagues to take this important issue forward, both on a bilateral and on a multilateral basis.

Mr. Bradshaw: Is the Minister aware that Europe spends about two thirds of what America spends on defence, but that European taxpayers gets less than 20 per cent. of American capability for their money? Does he agree with the Deputy Secretary of State of the United States, Strobe Talbott, who said recently in London that America wanted to see

"a strong, integrated, self-confident and militarily capable Europe"?

Will he ignore the anti-Europeanism of the Conservative party and push forward vigorously with further European defence procurement co-operation, which is good for our defence industry, good for our security and good for the British taxpayer?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The Euro-sceptic rubbish exemplified by the letter from the Opposition defence spokesman is true to form for those who put their narrow sectarian interest ahead of the national interest. Along with five of our European partners, we have signed a letter of intent which will lead to the efficiencies in procurement across Europe which we all seek. That will contribute to our collective security in the continent as a whole.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): The House will welcome the action that has already been taken by major British companies in restructuring Europe's defence industries. The restructuring has led to the emergence of more multinational companies to compete more effectively with the United States, although I hope that the Minister will confirm that that development in no way envisages a Fortress Europe, as the north Atlantic links are still very strong. However, what will the Government do about security of supply, which, with multinational companies, becomes much more important?

Under the letter of intent in the OCCAR arrangements, security of supply is meant to be safe. However, when will the Government deal with the problem of giving those arrangements treaty powers, so that we really know that

we shall be able to get from multinational suppliers the equipment that we need for our armed forces when they are in action?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Those are clearly matters between the companies concerned. We look for mutual guarantees on security matters. However, I welcome the more constructive view expressed by the hon. Gentleman on the need for that type of restructuring, which was welcomed by Strobe Talbott in his speech of 7 October. I do not think that there is any danger of a division between the United States and Europe on those matters.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

4. **Mr. Martin Salter** (Reading, West): If he will make a statement on his policy in respect of representations concerning the holding of a public inquiry into the health, safety and environmental aspects of the work of the atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston. [96125]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Aldermaston is a nuclear licensed site and is subject to independent and strict regulation by the nuclear installations inspectorate and by the Environment Agency. The regulators cover every aspect of the site's operations and procedures as they affect health, safety and the environment. They have power to enforce compliance and to close down operations if they believe such action is justified. They are publicly accountable and publish all information they believe to be significant.

Mr. Salter: Does my right hon. Friend accept that public fears and concerns have been exacerbated by the recent spate of incidents at AWE Aldermaston, including the unauthorised discharge of radioactive substances into watercourses; the impending prosecution by the Environment Agency; the descaling of the Pangbourne pipeline, resulting in the uncontrolled release of uranium and plutonium particles; and the recent well-publicised breaches of safety procedure? Does he accept that those understandable concerns and fears will be allayed only by a full, open and independent public inquiry, which is the policy of both West Berkshire council and Reading borough council, and was once, in 1994, the policy of the then Opposition?

Mr. Hoon: I recognise that there is public concern. However, safe operation is of prime importance to the atomic weapons establishment. It is also at the forefront of the minds of the operating company, the Ministry of Defence and the nuclear installations inspectorate. Claims that, in the past year, the AWE has been at risk of major nuclear accident are simply untrue. It is also false to say that the AWE has been seeking to hide anything. The incidents in the articles to which my hon. Friend refers were taken from the AWE's own safety-related incident reports, which are released into the public domain as a matter of routine—in contrast to the somewhat hysterical attitude that has been displayed by certain newspapers.

I know that my hon. Friend has taken the trouble to visit the site, and that he was impressed with how it was managed and with AWE's policy of openness. In those circumstances, I hope he will accept that, without further specific evidence of real risk to the public, employees or the environment, there is currently simply no basis on which to hold a public inquiry.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): My constituents are split between those who are worried about what is or may be going on at Aldermaston and those who are exasperated, as the Secretary of State said, by the way in which various scare stories are being hyped up by newspapers and others who should know better. Does the Secretary of State agree that both those groups of people would be helped by a full public and open inquiry so we know exactly what is going on and that, if the scare stories are untrue, they shall be seen as such at the earliest possible moment?

Mr. Hoon: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern, which is based on real public concern about the way in which those particular stories have been, as he says, hyped up in the newspapers. Nevertheless, I make it clear that the illustrations relied on, particularly by one Sunday newspaper, were ones that were routinely reported and allowed into the public domain. There is therefore nothing to hide, or to discover, which a public inquiry could reveal. It should be emphasised to local people, whether they work at the plant or not, that no present danger to the environment, the work force or the local population was found.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In the light of that, what assessment has the right hon. Gentleman personally made of the allegations about environmental contamination? On the strength of his inquiries, does he agree with the organisation that the claims thus far levelled against it are nothing more than irresponsible scaremongering?

Mr. Hoon: I have examined each of the incidents that the newspaper alleged amounted to a real threat to the environment and local people. The accounts were based on reports that were to be released to the local liaison committee for discussion by people in the immediate area. Having read them carefully, I have not found any credible evidence of damage to the environment, to people who work in the plant or to the local community.

Kosovo

5. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): If he will make a statement on future commitments in Kosovo. [96126]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The United Kingdom remains committed to long-term peace and stability in Kosovo, and the Balkans as a whole. KFOR has now reached its intended strength of 50,000. British troops currently contribute a framework brigade headquarters and two battle groups, plus supporting elements—about 5,000 personnel in total, down from a peak of 10,500. We keep our force levels under constant review and do not keep troops in operational theatres longer than is absolutely necessary.

Barbara Follett: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he accept that although we were right to send troops to Kosovo and East Timor, our current level of

commitment is taking its toll on our forces and their families, and that we should do all that we can to reduce the burden on them?

Mr. Hoon: I agree that we should aim to reduce our commitments where it is prudent to do so. I am aware of the demands placed on our armed forces and their families by the problems of overstretch. The recent withdrawals from Kosovo underline our commitment to minimise those problems, and I am pleased to tell the House that, following the recent restructuring of SFOR in Bosnia, about 900 of our service personnel will be home for Christmas. That also means that 900 personnel who were expecting to go to Bosnia will not now be deployed there.

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): Is the Secretary of State aware that there are about 14,000 unexploded cluster bombs lying on the ground in Kosovo, which are in effect aerially sown anti-personnel mines that maim and kill the innocent almost daily? As NATO dropped those bomblets, can NATO also play some part in clearing them?

Mr. Hoon: NATO is playing a considerable part in clearing them. Indeed, United Kingdom troops have cleared more than 1,500 unexploded cluster bomb munitions from our sector—more than 80 per cent. of such unexploded ordnance in that area. KFOR as a whole has cleared more than 3,800 unexploded cluster bomb munitions, in addition to about 4,400 Serbian anti-personnel mines and 2,300 Serbian anti-tank mines.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is it true that the Irish Guards is the only unit that does night patrols in Kosovo?

Mr. Hoon: I do not know, but I shall find out and write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): It is true.

May I warmly welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his job and tell him, as he already knows, how lucky he is to have it, what fun it will be, and how fascinating he will find it? In the order of battle for Kosovo, as the winter approaches and life becomes tougher, will he consider whether he can find additional engineer reserves, whose prime purpose would be to assist in the necessary work of reconstruction?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his good wishes. When I am stuck for further information I shall know where to come.

We are considering a variety of ways in which we can assist throughout the winter. Subject to votes in the House, I hope to visit both Bosnia and Kosovo in the next few days. I will consider the hon. Gentleman's specific suggestion and see whether what he asks for is necessary and whether we can carry it through.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Has my right hon. Friend seen the reports that deny the atrocities that occurred in Kosovo? Will he take this opportunity to make it clear that there is enough evidence to show how justified the international community was in taking military action? Is he altogether satisfied that enough is being done to protect the lives of civilian Serbs, who can in no way be held responsible for the crimes and atrocities that occurred, from the thuggish element among the ethnic Albanians, which—however small it may be—is to a large extent the mirror image of its Serbian counterpart?

Mr. Hoon: During one of my previous ministerial responsibilities, I happened to be the Foreign Office Minister on duty when details of atrocities discovered by British forces were first made known. There is no doubt from the evidence that it was necessary for NATO to launch Operation Allied Force to prevent what was undoubtedly an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe, perpetrated by the forces of Slobodan Milosevic. As for the present security situation, I have had the opportunity of visiting Kosovo and I can tell the House that it is improving. While incidents of intimidation and murder continue to occur, they are declining, and the crime rate in Pristina is lower than in some western cities.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Is not the main lesson of the high continuing commitment in Kosovo and elsewhere that this is an unsuitable time for the Foreign Secretary to offer a blank cheque of further British troops to the United Nations?

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not offer the UN a blank cheque. The information to which the hon. Gentleman refers concerns forces that may be available to the UN in the event of their being requested. That is a standard procedure which has been in operation for many years.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, the crime rate in Kosovo is falling, but it is still high and includes ethnic killings. Will he give a commitment that western forces will act against such killings wherever they come across them? Many of the Kosovan Serbs who fled into Serbia have been treated badly there, and some will in due course wish to return to Kosovo. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that they will be welcomed back into Kosovo, which will become a better, more multi-ethnic place in the future?

Mr. Hoon: I wish to make it clear that KFOR troops are providing robust and even-handed protection for everyone in Kosovo, regardless of their ethnic, religious or cultural background. On one of my visits to Kosovo I had the opportunity to meet representatives of the Serbian community. They made it clear that their people across the border in areas controlled by Milosevic were treated badly and were anxious to return. It is obviously the responsibility of the international community to provide a secure situation in Kosovo so that they can be encouraged to go back to their homes.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his post? I wish him the best of luck in what is arguably the best job in the Government. The UN document which was mentioned earlier contains a wish list of units and equipment on which it could call. It states that three aircraft capable of heavy lift would be available to the UN, but we have no such aircraft. The action in Kosovo proved the need for them. Will we rent them, or will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to make the decision that

was postponed in the summer and order equipment that the armed forces want? I know that the Marines are due to go to Kosovo soon, but we also understand that as a result of the pressure on money—the Government are to cut a further £600 million in the coming Budget—the Marines will not take part in exercises in Norway, as is their usual custom.

Mr. Hoon: I shall deal with all the various points made by the hon. Gentleman but first I thank him for his kind words. He and I debated European matters when we both first arrived in the House of Commons. I am sure that his views on Europe have remained the same, and that we shall debate them again in due course.

There are two separate competitions to supply our forces' requirement for heavy-lift aircraft, in the short term and the long term. Both those competitions are under way, and I anticipate that they will both reach successful conclusions.

The decision about the marines was taken not because of lack of resources. We have heard already today about the pressure that our forces face as a result of their constant involvement in operations. Training in Norway and in Arctic conditions clearly puts a great strain on them. We have sought to relieve that strain by cancelling the operation for this particular year.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): I welcome the news that many service personnel will return from Bosnia in time for Christmas with their families. However, will my right hon. Friend assure me that everything will be done to ensure that those accused of war crimes in Bosnia will still be brought to justice?

Mr. Hoon: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. There will be no let-up in the effort to track down those suspected of war crimes. In fact, British forces have been more successful than the forces of any other nation represented in Bosnia in bringing war criminals to justice. They have worked hard to ensure that none of those accused of war crimes escapes justice.

Procurement

6. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): What changes against planned expenditure on defence procurement there have been this year. [96127]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): I expect expenditure on defence systems procurement this financial year to be within the level reported in the Government's expenditure plans.

Mr. Burns: Given that an important part of the manufacturing base in Chelmsford relies on defence contracts, may I say how pleased I am that Alenia Marconi will benefit from the signing of the contract for the principal anti-aircraft missile contract. However, is the Minister confident that the smart procurement savings will be made? If not, is he prepared to make a commitment that the Government will make up from other sources the shortfall in funding for defence procurement?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am absolutely confident that all the objectives associated with smart procurement will be reached. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to that matter, as the initiative has proved extremely attractive, in our defence budget and across Europe. I am also pleased to tell him that it is likely that Chelmsford will benefit from the principal anti-air missile for future warships project to the extent of some £100 million of investment. I do not foresee any change in that, under present circumstances.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): What progress is being made on the procurement decision for the beyond visible range anti-aircraft missile? Many companies and jobs depend on that decision. It is to be hoped that the British Aerospace Meteor programme—which is a pan-European missile—will be successful. If we do not get that, we will lose the relevant technology in this country.

Mr. Kilfoyle: It is true to say that all such projects depend on the effectiveness of the product, and on value for money. The competition is fair and open. We must assess each bid as it comes in for the projects under consideration.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): I remind the Minister that the paragraph 96 of the strategic defence review identified an "urgent" need to improve our strategic transport. It suggested that the short-term solution was to acquire four McDonnell Douglas C-17 aircraft, or their equivalent. Is not that a grave deficiency that must be rectified at the earliest possible date? Was not the Secretary of State being disingenuous when he said that the short-term strategic transport aircraft requirement continued? I received a letter from Baroness Symons, the Minister for Defence Procurement, saying that the requirement had been terminated. No decision has been reached, but confusion continues.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is confusing two different competitions. We fully intend to procure four aircraft in the short term, by one means or another, but we recognise that there are two separate issues. It may be argued that the long-term contract is even more important than the short-term. Responses have been received from Airbus Industrie, Boeing and Lockheed Martin. Each will be considered in due course.

Air Training Corps

7. **Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington): If he will make a statement about his Department's measures to support recruitment through Air Training Corps. [96128]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar): The principal role of the Air Training Corps is as a national youth organisation. Its aims are to foster a spirit of adventure and develop qualities of leadership and good citizenship. It is, however, a valuable source of recruits and, with that in mind, RAF recruiting teams aim to visit every ATC squadron twice a year.

Mr. Plaskitt: The Warwick and Leamington Spa squadron of the ATC, which I had the pleasure of visiting recently, does an excellent education and training job with young people as well as producing many enthusiastic

recruits for our armed forces. However, for more than three years, the squadron has had to operate in temporary and shared accommodation. Will my hon. Friend look into the squadron's accommodation to see whether any assistance might be offered?

Mr. Spellar: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the interest that he has shown in the Warwick and Leamington Spa ATC. I agree that the accommodation is not ideal, although it is adequate. The lease on the building is due for renewal, which may allow a change in location, depending on the availability of suitable and affordable alternatives. I understand that there are hopes that the squadron may collocate with an Army Cadet Force unit in a new building. I shall ask my officials to liaise with my hon. Friend on developments.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): As we are discussing service recruitment, may I put it to the Minister that when I did my basic training as a national service private soldier, some of the best chaps in my platoon were former borstal boys? One of them taught me how to get out of handcuffs, one of the few technological skills that I have ever acquired. Many young men get into trouble because they have never been connected with any organisation in which they could take pride. Nor have they ever had proper leadership. Many such chaps—though not, of course, all of them—would make first-class soldiers if they were carefully picked.

Mr. Spellar: Given the hon. Gentleman's illustrious career in the City, I wonder whether those were golden handcuffs.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for that positive contribution and for offering a breadth of experience that has been less apparent in some of the other remarks that we have heard on this matter. I thank him, too, for reinforcing the importance of the cadet forces. In many parts of the country they provide scope for leadership and a structured life through involvement in structured organisations. Many youngsters go on to serve in our armed forces, although that is not the sole, or even primary, purpose of the cadet forces. Those youngsters rise well through the forces, and there is an extremely good retention rate among them. The money that we are investing in the cadet forces is good for the services and for the community and the country. The hon. Gentleman's points were well made.

Learning Forces Initiative

8. **Mr. Syd Rapson** (Portsmouth, North): If he will make a statement on the progress of the Learning Forces Initiative. [96129]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar): The learning forces range of measures is giving armed forces personnel enhanced opportunities for self-development, linked to achievement of academic, vocational and professional qualifications. By fostering service people's lifelong learning, the initiative is preparing them for their eventual return to civilian life. Our learning forces programme forms an important aspect of our policy for people in the armed forces.

Mr. Rapson: Although the initiative is very welcome, will my hon. Friend acknowledge that a substantial number of naval personnel are away at sea for extended periods? There is a need for more information technology and distance-learning facilities. My constituency has a substantial population of Navy personnel. Can the Minister assure me that the learning forces initiative will facilitate their needs?

Mr. Spellar: I thank my hon. Friend for that question because he highlights the different circumstances that apply to different services. We recognise the special difficulties for lifelong learning imposed on the Navy by the necessity of service at sea. That is why enhanced information technology-based learning facilities are being trialled on HMS Invincible. Depending on that trial's success, we will look for further opportunities for IT-based learning on ships.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Minister knows that I represent many serving and retired officers. Despite the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir P. Tapsell), several of them told me this weekend of their concern that the Government are concentrating in the strategic defence review on what they say are their policies for people, such as the learning forces initiative, to prevent the service people who have been leaving in droves in response to the Government's overstretch policies from leaving the services. It would be better to concentrate on looking after the men and officers already serving than to take desperate measures such as trying to recruit from the criminal classes.

Mr. Spellar: Oh dear! Things have degenerated slightly. The hon. Gentleman is not only wrong about recruitment policy but underestimates the considerable advances that are being made on retention measures, whether through the service task force initiative, the work that we are doing with other Departments to improve the position of service families, the learning forces initiative or the work that we are undertaking so that our service men and women can have qualifications that are recognised externally so as to be portable to their future careers in the civilian world. If he talked not to the retired service men who may be putting that view but to active service men and women about the greater educational opportunities that already exist and the further developments that are taking place, he would have a different perspective.

Armed Forces (Homosexuals)

9. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): What assessment he has made of the effects on armed forces discipline of the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on homosexuals in Britain's armed forces. [96130]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): My predecessor made it clear on 27 September this year that we accepted the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the cases brought by

homosexual former members of the armed forces. We have set in hand an urgent review of policy in this area in the light of the judgment. I shall announce the outcome of that review as soon as possible.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that reply. However, given the deep and profound hostility among service men throughout the country to this ruling, and given that the Government argued vigorously at the European Court of Human Rights that to allow openly homosexual people to join the forces would be deeply damaging to their operational effectiveness, is it now his position that operational effectiveness will not be damaged, or is he prepared to accept that an Albanian, an Austrian and a Lithuanian judge are entitled to usurp the right of this House and our elected Government to determine the composition of the Her Majesty's armed forces?

Mr. Hoon: I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that this Government intend to uphold the law. In the light of the decision by the European Court of Human Rights, it is clear that we need a revised policy that sustains operational effectiveness and is within the law. Discipline is a key element in ensuring that we continue to have operationally effective forces. That is why we will underpin any new policy with a code of conduct that will operate across the three services and cover personal relationships and sexual behaviour generally.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the progress that the Government are now making. Does he agree that, as we near the end of the 20th century, homophobic bigotry has no place in Her Majesty's armed forces and that it should not determine the recruitment policies of the military?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his observations. I have made it clear that the Government—unlike, apparently, some Opposition Members—are determined to uphold the law, but that we will do so in a way consistent with the operational effectiveness of our armed forces.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): The question relates to the impact of the judgment on the effectiveness of the armed forces. The European Court gave a split decision by seven judges, one of whom was so biased that he would have failed the Hoffman test and none of whom have served in the armed forces, but the Government tell us that they have no opinion as to the impact on the armed forces of the decision. When he was shadow spokesman on defence, the present Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid) said:

> "Let me repeat that we in the Labour party have never given the green light to homosexual activity, conduct or relationships in the armed forces . . . We fully accept the particular conditions of the armed forces and that homosexual . . . relationships . . . can undermine and be prejudicial to good order and morale."—[*Official Report*, 4 May 1995; Vol. 259, c. 527.]

At that time, the Conservatives supported that view and we support it now. Does the Secretary of State think that the judgment will have an effect on the efficiency, good morale and good order of the armed forces?

Mr. Hoon: I am still unclear as to the position of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. I have made the Government's position absolutely clear: we will uphold the rule of law, and promote a policy that is consistent both with the rule of law and with operational effectiveness. It is important that Members on the Opposition Front Bench make it clear whether they are equally willing to uphold the law. I have discussed this matter with the Chief of the Defence Staff on several occasions; I am sure that I shall do so again before any final decisions are reached. However, as soon as those decisions are reached, I shall make a statement to the House.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Church Buildings (VAT)

35. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What progress has been made towards reducing VAT on labour-intensive repairs to church buildings; and if he will make a statement. [96158]

38. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): What recent representations he has received concerning VAT on church repairs; and if he will make a statement. [96161]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I have received a number of representations on the matter, and the commissioners have joined the other central bodies of the Church of England in sending a detailed response to the Government's consultation document, issued by the Treasury in March this year. The Church is concerned that the consultation document repeats the view that European Commission regulations mean that the United Kingdom Government cannot consider introducing new VAT reliefs. As right hon. and hon. Members will be aware, the Church feels that there may be some scope for extending reduced VAT rates through an extension of items listed by the European Union Commission in annexe H to the sixth directive.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that reply. Will he inform the House what progress has been made—especially in regard to my representations in the House and to representations from the other place? I understand that the hon. Gentleman might be minded to support the exemptions to which he referred. What support might we receive from the Paymaster General towards that end?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her support for the campaign. The General Synod, meeting in York during the summer, debated a motion on the scope and rate of VAT as it affects the ministry of the Church. On a vote, the motion was carried without dissent. A similar

view is held by those representing other faiths and secular charities. I hope to make a statement shortly as to how we might proceed with the campaign.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I fully support the hon. Gentleman if he feels able personally to mount a campaign to persuade the Government on this vexed question of VAT on repairs to Church buildings. Does he accept that, in essence, the problem is that, although the Government, with one hand, give certain grants on certain occasions to certain Churches, they take, with both hands, an axe called 17½ per cent. VAT on repairs? In support of his campaign, will he recognise that, in all equity, any relief on VAT for repairs to church buildings should cover all Churches—not only his own—and indeed the buildings of other established religious organisations?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those questions. I shall be seeking a place in the ballot to obtain an Adjournment Debate on the subject. The many different faith traditions in the UK, which are represented by the Church's main committee, and many other charities should be grouped together in the campaign. I hope that the Church, through the Second Church Estates Commissioner, will be able to give leadership in the campaign and that it will be fruitful.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): May I, uncharacteristically, echo the comments of the hon. Members for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman)? My hon. Friend's answer will be disappointing to churchwardens in the Akeley South deanery in North-West Leicestershire, who attended a recent meeting led by the Bishop of Leicester at which the topic most often raised was the immense difficulty experienced by thousands of communities in rural areas in raising money to repair their beautiful buildings, most of which are listed, in addition to which £1 of every £7 they raise goes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Will my hon. Friend continue his campaign?

Mr. Bell: The campaign is in rather early days for my answer to have been disappointing. Since the beginning of time, Caesar—that is, the state—has received whatever he wants, and we are about to end the millennium rendering unto Caesar VAT that is too heavy and too unreformed.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): Is my hon. Friend aware that the diocese of Oxford is a landowner in an area in my constituency where the economy is booming and land prices are high; and that the diocese has proposed that St. Barnabas church and its associated hall, which lie at the heart of their community in south Reading, should be torn down and bulldozed for profit? Will he give an assurance that such activities on the part of the diocese can be limited?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me prior notice of her question. I have read the *Reading Chronicle* so as to be able to answer it. The position of the Church Commissioners is that we have received no proposals from the diocese about that church; at this stage, it is entirely a matter for the Oxford diocese. The commissioners have a quasi-judicial role, which they might have to exercise in this case, so I am not able to take the matter further on the Floor of the House.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

Departmental Market Testing

36. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the resources available to determine the effectiveness of market testing by Government Departments. [96159]

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The commission has to ensure that the National Audit Office has sufficient resources to carry out its work on a range of issues across all Government Departments and agencies. I am satisfied that that is the case at present, including, where appropriate, examinations of market testing by Government Departments. The NAO has conducted numerous detailed studies of market tests carried out by Government Departments and agencies, including services tested by means of public-private partnerships and the private finance initiative.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. Has there been any recent comparative study of the individual performance of different Government Departments in respect of market testing? What criteria have informed that study or evaluation? Is he now satisfied that examples of expensive disservice and slovenliness have been rooted out in favour of good practice and maximum value for money for the British taxpayer?

Mr. Sheldon: The NAO carries out many studies and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, it is important that they cover the whole range of Government Departments. An essential element of the work is that comparisons are made and presented to the commission, which meets next month to consider those and other matters.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Genetically Modified Organisms

37. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): When the commissioners expect to make a statement on the proposal to allow experimental growing of genetically modified organisms on the agricultural land for which they are responsible. [96160]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The issue of whether commissioners' land should be leased to allow trials of genetically modified crops to take place is being considered

initially by the Church's ethical investment working group, which develops a co-ordinated ethical investment policy for the Church.

Mr. Pike: Are any GM crops currently being grown on Church-owned land?

Mr. Bell: Currently, no GM crops are being grown on Church land. However, the commissioners have previously stated that, in respect of currently let tenanted farm land, it would be difficult in practice to stop our farmers from growing GM crops, should they want to do so. Like many farmers, ours have freedom of cropping and an attempt by the commissioners to prevent a tenant from growing GM crops might be challenged in the courts.

Wildlife

39. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What is his policy relating to the conservation of wildlife on Church Commissioners' land. [96162]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The commissioners have an overall wildlife and conservation plan, which was drawn up by the farming and wildlife advisory group for each of their agricultural estates. The plans are adopted and implemented as appropriate.

Mr. Robathan: I am glad to have that response. However, as the Church Commissioners examine investments ethically, will they move towards ensuring that all farming on Church land is environmentally friendly—that ties in with the previous question—and wildlife friendly? The Church Commissioners could thus—dare I say it—put their money where their mouth is and take a truly ethical stance by preserving the countryside.

Mr. Bell: The Church Commissioners take those matters seriously and consult their managers regularly. In view of their support for wildlife, we take environmentally friendly farming into account, but game shooting and foxhunting are matters for the agricultural and sporting tenants to determine.

Point of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As I informed you earlier today, last Thursday the Minister for Housing and Planning, the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), told the House that, on 30 September, he had relinquished his responsibilities as Minister for London and that, on that date, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), became Minister for London and took responsibility for all decisions on London policy, including the Greater London Authority Bill.

The Minister for Housing and Planning also told the House that all responsibility for policy matters relating to the Bill, including amendments tabled since 30 September, rested with that Under-Secretary and that the Minister was present simply in an advisory role. Yet the amendment on impeachment, which we tackled first on Thursday 4 November, was tabled after 30 September and considered in another place on 12 October. The Minister—not the Under-Secretary—dealt with the amendment in the House, 12 days after his resignation as Minister for London. Was it in order for the Minister to do that?

As the Minister continues to speak for the Government, and given the guidelines in the code for Ministers, there is a conflict of interest between his public duties and his private duties as campaign manager for the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). The Minister is in his place and, despite what he told the House last week, he clearly takes the lead role and the responsibility for guiding the Bill's passage. In the light of the ministerial code on conflicts of interest, has the Minister sought guidance from your office, Madam Speaker, on that conflict of interest? If so, can you give the House your ruling on the matter?

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of that point of order, which he helpfully did at some length. I can deal with it all the more speedily because I have had sight of it for some time and have been able to examine it.

The hon. Gentleman speaks of the application of the ministerial code. It is not for the Speaker to interpret or enforce that code. The hon. Gentleman must find other methods of pursuing the matter.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Even as the House debated the Greater London Authority Bill on Thursday, the Government tabled yet more amendments—including an important amendment, which the Secretary of State tabled, to disagree with the House of Lords. The amendments can only have appeared on the Order Paper on Friday. That hardly gave the House proper time to consider them at all—and certainly not in the context of the timetable motion.

Are you satisfied, Madam Speaker, that the timetable motion can possibly allow the House to consider properly amendments that were only tabled on Thursday and that appeared on the Order Paper on Friday? Can that be right?

Madam Speaker: The timetable motion is perfectly in order. As far as I and many hon. Members are concerned, Friday is a proper, full working day.

Greater London Authority Bill (Supplemental Allocation of Time)

3.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): I beg to move, Madam Deputy Speaker—sorry, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Get it right.

Mr. Hill: That is an unforgivable error, which no one could make in normal circumstances. At least I remember one thing: I am Minister for London.

I beg to move,

That the Order of the House of 13th January 1999 relating to the Greater London Authority Bill be supplemented as follows:

Lords Amendments

1.—(1) Proceedings on further Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion at ten o'clock.

(2) The remaining Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order, namely:

Nos. 41 to 126, 499, 127 to 212, 703, 213 to 422, 541, 793, 423 to 425, 426 to 498, 500 to 540, 542 to 702, 704 to 792 and 794 to 820.

(3) Each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

TABLE

Lords amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Nos. 41 to 126, 499, 127 to 212, 703, 213 to 422, 541, 793 and 423 to 425	8.00 p.m.
Nos. 426 to 498, 500 to 450, 542 to 702, 704 to 792 and 794 to 820	10.00 p.m.

2.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1.

(2) The Speaker shall—

(a) put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, a single Question on any further Amendments of the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Lords Amendment or, as the case may be, in the Lords Amendment as amended;

(b) put forthwith a single Question on any Amendments moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment followed by the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in their Amendment, or as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended;

(c) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in a Lords Amendment;

(d) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(3) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments, the Speaker shall put forthwith a single Question on any Amendments moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to the Lords Amendment.

Subsequent stages

3. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

4. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

5. For the purpose of bringing these proceedings to a conclusion the Speaker shall—

(a) put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided, and the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on or relevant to any of the remaining items in the Lords Message; and

(c) put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Reasons Committee

6. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

7.—(1) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

(2) Proceedings in the Committee shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion 30 minutes after their commencement.

(3) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with sub-paragraph (2), the Chairman shall—

(a) first put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided; and

(b) then put forthwith successively Questions on motions which may be made by a Minister of the Crown for assigning a Reason for disagreeing with the Lords in one of their Amendments.

(4) The proceedings of the Committee shall be reported without any further Question being put.

Miscellaneous

8. This paragraph applies to—

(a) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments;

(b) proceedings on any further Message from the Lords; and

(c) proceedings of the kind mentioned in paragraph 6.

9. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies.

10. Proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

11. If proceedings on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House would, by virtue of Standing Order No. 24 (Urgent matters), commence at a time when proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies are in progress, the proceedings on the Motion shall be postponed to the conclusion of the proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies.

12. No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which any proceedings are taken; and if a Minister makes any such Motion, the Question on the Motion shall be put forthwith.

13. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

14. If a Minister of the Crown makes a Motion for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order, the Question on the Motion shall be put forthwith and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Motion.

15. If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the conclusion of any proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

The Greater London Authority Bill implements our manifesto and White Paper commitment to create a mayor and Assembly for London. It implements policies endorsed overwhelmingly in last year's referendum. It is not, and should not be, a controversial piece of legislation. Indeed, during the Bill's passage through another place, on only one issue was an Opposition amendment carried in a Division.

Like any long and complex Bill, this Bill has been amended. However, that is not without precedent. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House explained last week, the Railways Act 1993, which was a much more contentious measure and a third of the size of the Bill, came back to the House with 470 amendments. That is proportionately twice the number of amendments that the House is now being asked to consider. Moreover, the vast majority of the amendments made to the Bill in another place were technical, many reflecting helpful points raised by Members during consideration in both Houses. Their number reflects the length and complexity of the Bill rather than any last-minute changes in policy.

Two days have been allocated for this stage of consideration of the Bill. The House will recall that the Bill went through its earlier Commons stage on an agreed programme motion. Agreement on timetabling was offered, formally and informally, on this occasion, but the Opposition rejected it. Given the generally non-contentious nature of the amendments before us, it should have been perfectly possible to complete the discussion amicably in two days. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Conservative Members sought to curtail proper debate on Thursday by indulging in time wasting of the crudest kind, thereby making the motion necessary.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hill: No, the right hon. Gentleman will have plenty of opportunity to contribute to the debate.

The Bill is an important part of the Government's programme. We are committed to ensuring that its passage is secured. I commend the revised motion to the House.

3.37 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): What a pathetic performance from the Minister. He does not even know, Madam Speaker, that you are Madam Speaker, although I am pleased to say that you have been in that post for a long time. He does not know whether he is the Minister for London, or whether the Minister for Housing and Planning still has that job. We know that there is a back-seat driver, and there may even be a front-seat driver sitting next to this junior Minister.

The Government need more guillotines than the French revolution, and for rather less consequence, but this Bill should not be guillotined tonight, because the Government are rewriting it as they go along. I have never seen such a mighty list of amendments tabled so late to a Bill. More than 800 Government amendments have been tabled, reflecting the acceptance by the Minister in the other place that the Bill is a mess and a farce, and the acceptance by the draftsmen that the job that these Ministers have done is so bad that great chunks of the Bill had to be rewritten after it had been through its Committee stages in both Houses of Parliament. Any decent, self-respecting Government would start again. They would come here to apologise and say that they have made a mighty mess. They would start again with a new Committee stage and a new Bill that had been properly amended and properly thought through, so that we could scrutinise it and do our job.

The Minister may say that we do not need to debate this motion, but he does not like democracy. I have got news for him: people outside the House value their democracy and they think that such major constitutional measures should be properly drafted and properly discussed. They will share my sense of outrage and insult that the Bill is being treated in this way and that the House of Commons has been sidelined and scoffed at by the Minister, who should know much better.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Was it a symptom of the right hon. Gentleman's attachment to democracy that he supported the abolition of the Greater London council, which left London with no democratic authority whatever?

Mr. Redwood: My credentials in favour of democracy are extremely strong. I am a great believer in elected boroughs throughout London that can carry the voice of the people into the council chamber and make the right decisions. What I dislike about this Government is their attitude towards this great Parliament and their refusal to let us have proper debate. They stifle debate and then return with an apology of a Bill which has so many amendments that the House does not have a chance to consider them.

Do not just take my word for how unsatisfactory the legislation is. We have on the record from another place the view of the Minister, Lord Whitty, who has been handling it there. Stating how bad the Bill was, he said:

> "I am not going to put my hand on my heart and say that everything is absolutely right with this Bill and that we shall not have to legislate within the foreseeable future."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 November 1999; Vol. 606, c. 673.]

Even after 800-odd Government amendments, the Minister accepts that the Bill is still a mess, that the Government may have to come back to the House in the future, and that there may well need to be amendments to the amendments, some of which are no doubt already amendments to amendments, so many stages has this miserable legislation undergone.

There are many things wrong with the Bill that require time for proper debate on the Floor of the House, in the light of the Government's revised vi[illegible]t it is time to bring the public up to date with the shenanigans over transport in London. We know that the Government are about to sign up to a public-private partnership, or at least, we think they are, because we have read it in the press. Some of what the Government tell the press is accurate. In this case, I believe what the Government are telling the press. They probably are close to signing up to a public-private partnership.

[Mr. Redwood]

What is the point of electing a mayor to high office in London to sort out London's transport system, if the main decisions have already been taken by the Secretary of State behind closed doors, without proper scrutiny, without a proper statement to the House of Commons and without even a proper debate on the issues tonight if time is used up on other momentous points before we reach those crucial clauses?

We are worried about the Government's attitude to parking and congestion. We know that their policy in general is tax and tax again—if it moves, tax it; if does not move, tax it; if it both moves and stays still, tax it on both occasions. We know that that is their policy, and deep in the clauses and amendments there are powers and statements relevant to it. That surely is worthy of a major debate in the Chamber this afternoon and this evening, but we will not have enough time for it because of the Government's mean-minded guillotine motion.

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): The right hon. Gentleman is taking up time.

Mr. Redwood: I am told that I have no right to complain about the allocation of time. I intend to keep my remarks short. The Government cannot be bothered to give us a decent amount of time for the Bill, but I have every right in this place to tell the public of London and the nation how we are being treated, how they are being treated, how measures on big issues such as parking, congestion, traffic and transport are being rushed through, with huge powers in the Bill and huge changes in the amendments, and no opportunity to discuss them properly.

We heard on Thursday, in a debate that was full of substance and was not part of any filibuster—there was no filibuster—that there is no serious power in the Bill to allow the Assembly to control or discipline the mayor. What is the point of the Assembly unless it can engage with what the mayor is doing and, in extreme circumstances, remove the mayor from office? We had no satisfactory answers from Ministers.

We are now told that our wish to discuss that fundamental constitutional principle, with many good contributions from both sides of the Chamber, was part of a filibuster and justifies the Government's action in imposing the guillotine today. They should look at the facts of that debate. If they saw what took place on Thursday, they would know that in a debate of five and three quarter hours, Ministers and Labour Back-Benchers took up two hours, and half an hour was spent in Divisions.

I have seen hon. Members trying to filibuster in the House, particularly when Labour was in opposition. I remember Ministers speaking for three or four minutes, and Opposition Back Benchers speaking for three or four hours. That is the sort of balance that occurs when there is an attempt to talk a Bill out. The debate on Thursday was serious. It was constrained because we were all conscious of the lack of time, and the fact that the time was so evenly balanced across the Chamber shows that Labour Back Benchers and Ministers also recognised that there were serious points at issue, which needed proper discussion.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Can he identify a single issue raised in that debate that had not previously been debated in Committee and in the other place?

Mr. Redwood: All the issues were new, because they concerned new wording for the Bill proposed by the Government. The Minister cannot say that we were not entitled to scrutinise the detailed recommendations or lack of them because some of the general points had been discussed previously. We had before us a most important amendment that needed to be discussed on the Floor of the House, and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman dares to suggest that the House should not have been able to discuss a matter of such fundamental importance. I stress that we were not trying to talk the Bill out; we were trying to talk some sense into it.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way because, as is usual these days, he has singularly understated his case in dissecting that of the Government. Does he not agree that it is highly significant that, there are only five Labour Back Benchers present to witness this denial of democracy that the Government intend to perpetrate today? Will it not be interesting to observe whether they are members of the pre-programmed robotic tendency or whether they feel able to deliver themselves of a word of criticism of the Government's outrageous conduct?

Mr. Redwood: I agree with my hon. Friend's thrust. I hope that some Labour Back Benchers will realise that the Bill's drafting contains serious defects and bring that to the attention of the House.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Has it occurred to my right hon. Friend that we did not range even wider last Thursday because a number of us sat on our hands and kept our mouths shut in order to make progress?

Mr. Redwood: That is quite right. I had to sit on my hands and keep quiet when I felt like intervening because I knew that time was so limited.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Further to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), I spoke for only six minutes during that debate, but the Whip sat on me because even that was judged too long. Was my speech a filibuster? Is not there something wrong with our procedures when we spent the whole of last Monday discussing whether we should print Acts of Parliament on vellum, and finished early, but are spending just two days discussing 800 amendments?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. We finished early last Monday and the House has had the longest holidays in living memory, but the Government dare to introduce such momentous legislation on a rushed timetable.

The Labour mayoral candidates are so embarrassed by the Bill that they have not attended this crucial debate. On Thursday, only one candidate was present for part of the time—the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras

(Mr. Dobson) turned up—but we wonder why the others do not attend, do not vote and do not take an interest. We also wonder why the Minister for Housing and Planning does all the talking, and his right hon. Friend does none, when he is only the campaign manager—an odd role to combine with that of the Minister making such important decisions. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): The Minister says that this is boring.

Mr. Redwood: Now the Minister dares to tell us that this is all boring when we are dealing with the substance of the argument about democracy in London—his Bill, who should be mayor and under what conditions the mayor should be appointed. One can only conclude that Greenwich fiddles while Holborn and St. Pancras burns. We see him looking all too shaken, because we know that he is guilty: as a Minister making decisions on matters so close to his political interests, he ought properly to resign from his role in respect of the Bill and disappear. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras should appear, declare his legitimate interest and make a contribution to the proceedings.

I am conscious that there is not sufficient time to discuss the motion and that we want to debate many weighty issues properly this evening. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends want to contribute, and I suspect that some Labour and Liberal Members want to do so as well, so I urge the House to reject the guillotine motion. As I fear that it will not, I shall conclude my remarks.

3.49 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I reiterate the point made by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) about the complexity of the Bill. We have received 820 amendments from the other place and although a large number of them are technical, they have important consequences for how the Bill will be implemented. I should point out that the other place took one decision by amending the Bill—the Minister was good enough to refer to it—that relates to the capacity of the Assembly to recall the mayor. I take exception to the suggestion that Thursday's debate in the House on the one change imposed by the other place was a filibuster. We had to give that matter serious consideration. The debate was not a mistake; it was our constitutional duty to have it. Serious issues are at stake and it is entirely proper for the House to give time and thought to them.

When I asked the Leader of the House about the guillotine at business questions last week, part of the excuse given for it was that others had tabled guillotine motions in the past and that previous Bills had been subject to large numbers of amendments. Again today, the Minister has said that we should reconsider the Railways Act 1993, to which 470 amendments were tabled—four times as many pro rata as to this Bill. Those observations are a criticism of the size and complexity of the Bill in its original form; it does not excuse the fact that we have more than 800 amendments to consider in two days, which is simply unachievable.

May I draw your attention, Madam Speaker, to the table in the motion, where reference is made to clauses that will be considered at 10 pm? The motion refers to amendments Nos. 426 to 498 and then to Nos. 500 to 450. We shall no doubt—

Madam Speaker: Order. May I interrupt the hon. Gentleman? It is a misprint. The motion should refer to amendments Nos. 500 to 540. It was wise of the hon. Gentleman to bring the mistake to my attention and that of the House.

Mr. Stunell: That, Madam Speaker, proves that the Bill is so complicated and complex that, even when the Government list the clauses to be timetabled, it is difficult to get the information correct. That mistake encapsulates the difficulties that the motion poses for the House, and reveals the Government's arrogance in pushing it forward.

Some key issues in the Bill will now probably not be considered properly. Those include the public-private partnership arrangements, which amount to the privatisation of a major nationalised industry—the London tube. The Bill proposes a major change in the financing of one of the capital's most important institutions, and the relevant amendment appears on the Order Paper for decision this evening. However, the relevant debates will almost certainly be too truncated to allow serious discussion of the proposals' merits. That service has a tremendous impact on the capital and it is a vital issue in the forthcoming mayoral campaign. It will, however, be completely side-stepped as a result of the motion.

Other issues are also at stake. Road user charging, a new principle for the country, is to be piloted under this legislation, but it will not be subject to proper scrutiny in the House. Consultation with disabled groups will also be skated around.

The only decision with which the House of Lords disagreed, mayoral recall—and it did so by a majority of two to one, which was not a marginal disagreement or even one to which those who have subsequently lost their places there contributed—is now being held up as the reason why we have to have a guillotine motion preventing us from discussing such vital matters.

The Liberal Democrats oppose the timetable motion. We believe that it is a recipe for making complex legislation worse and that it undermines attempts made in this House and elsewhere to improve the legislative process so that, in future, we can produce legislation of which we are proud, rather than that which we have to excuse. We also believe that the motion makes the prospect of a Greater London Authority that is able to exercise its powers in a straightforward way more difficult to achieve.

3.54 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Normally, we would have welcomed the speech of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill). He is new to the job, and we would have thought that he would be keen to impress, and to make a bit of a name for himself in London. His performance was perfunctory in the extreme, however. Long may he remain in his present role; on the basis of today's performance, he will lose a lot of votes for Labour.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

The Labour party's action in guillotining the debate demonstrates a supreme contempt for democracy which would have done justice to the Socialist Unity party in the German Democratic Republic that came to an end 10 years ago. Londoners and others will not ignore the fact—we certainly have not ignored it—that Thursday's debate was rightly taken up mostly by what people regard as the very essence of democracy, namely accountability: the ability to bring to account those who exercise executive responsibility by virtue of their democratic election to the mayoralty. None of us, I am sure, felt that we had spoken for too long in any sense, although we may have felt that the Minister for Housing and Planning—who was being his usual charming, affable self—did speak for a little too long. In fact, we thought that he spoke for much too long.

The truth is that the Minister should not have spoken at all. He continues to take the Queen's shilling, but spends most of his time as campaign manager for the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). Most people in London would not regard that as an appropriate use of taxpayers' money; they believe that Ministers of the Crown are paid to do their job full time. We have learned that the Minister's job, from September, is not to be Minister for London, and we therefore wonder why he is here—except, of course, to help out the Under-Secretary, who is so new to these matters that he cannot advance an argument in favour of the guillotine for more than two minutes.

Mr. Bercow: Does my hon. Friend agree that, quite apart from the interests of value for money for the taxpayer and the propriety of the Minister fulfilling the responsibilities for which he is paid rather than those for which he is not, it would be very much in the interests of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) if the Minister spent less time on his campaign and more time in the House?

Mr. Wilkinson: I leave that to the judgment of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, who before too long will himself be judged by that egregious college which is the Labour party's selectorate. If he pleases that egregious college, he will go on to be judged by the much more discriminating electoral college composed of the people of London. It will be a matter for those twin judgments.

The Government had plenty of time. We could have continued much later than 7 pm on Thursday. The Government like a cosy life: they do not wish the myriad amendments that they have incorporated in the Bill to be properly discussed. Discussing and considering amendments, however, is an important function. We cannot simply incorporate provisions in legislation. One point was agreed by Members on both sides of the House at the outset: the devil is in the detail. We have had no time to discuss that devilish detail, and much do we bewail the fact. Similarly, we could have continued until much later than 10 o'clock tonight if the business managers had organised the debate properly.

As was made clear by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), exceedingly important issues are involved. Let me refer to another aspect of the public-private partnership. The electors of London, and the people of this country, will wonder why so little time has been allotted for us to discuss provisions relating to the PPP for the tube, when more than half a billion pounds of taxpayers' money must be spent on remedying the deficiencies of this policy which is still not in place.

Then there is the question of amendment No. 555, and the power to appoint staff. The Government love appointing people. Labour is, par excellence, the patronage party. In the intermediate period between the election and the mayor's assumption of responsibilities in July next year, the Secretary of State will be able to pack the Greater London Authority with his cronies. That is not democratic and it deserves considerable discussion tonight.

Last but not least, there is the issue of road user charges. I gather that they are to be based on distance travelled as well as the use of a vehicle to get to work. My constituents, who have to travel long distances to get to work because the public transport system is still inadequate, will not be delighted by that. Nor will they be enthused by Labour's attempts to diminish the reasonable opportunities afforded to Back Benchers and others to debate the issue.

All in all, the Government's performance is shameful, disreputable and shoddy. No wonder the Under-Secretary spoke for such a short time. Had he spoken any longer he would have brought the measure into even more disrepute.

4.1 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Proceedings on the Bill before it went to the Lords were a model for the lack of rancour with which they were conducted. There were occasional moments, but there are in any Committee. The Minister for Housing and Planning earned the praise of the Committee at the end of the proceedings for the manner in which he had conducted them. I am very sorry that the Government have tabled a guillotine motion, because it has introduced some rancour to the House's deliberations on a Bill which everyone agrees is important.

I admire the Leader of the House. I am glad that she survived the July and October reshuffles, because she is a good Leader of the House. I am not criticising her, but there was a time when the holder of her post attended and moved the motion in debates on guillotines. The right hon. Lady's one failing is that she has some of the characteristics of the speaking clock when she reads out that there is going to be a guillotine motion. I am not sure whether my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) drew attention to the fact that her two references to the first debate taking four hours were inaccurate by 53 minutes, because it took three hours and seven minutes, although I acknowledge that it was followed by a Division. Not having Divisions is very new Labour. It may be a reflection of the evils of Conservatism that we retain an old-fashioned democratic affection for an occasional vote, so I do not feel bad about the fact that we divided at the end of the first debate. Even so, the right hon. Lady greatly exaggerated the length of time that it took.

When the Bill came to us in Committee it had 270 clauses and 30 schedules. We added a further 30 clauses in Committee. It then went off to the House of Lords. My understanding is that after the to-ing and fro-ing with the

House of Lords is concluded, the Bill will have 413 clauses. That means that the Bill will have more than a third as many clauses as it had when it left this House and will have increased in size by more than 50 per cent. since it first went to the Standing Committee all those days ago in January. That is a massive increase, reinforcing what my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham said.

I shall not follow others—started by the Minister for Housing and Planning—in referring to candidates. Several Labour Members are, in one of Mr. Neil Kinnock's famous phrases, fighting like ferrets in a sack. In these days of political correctness, I should not want to say anything that was in any way disobliging to ferrets.

The Bill is too important to be hurried. I started by paying my respects to the Minister for Housing and Planning for the manner in which he initially conducted proceedings on the Bill. I can only express my regret that his thumbprint is on the guillotine that we are debating now.

4.5 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I wish to join my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) in what he said, which bears upon the way in which we conduct debates.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have made cogent and powerful points, as did the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell)—not the least of which is that there is a misprint in the motion. I do not know whether the Government will address that before we commence. If not, the misprint will stand as the order of this House if we go to a vote and the motion is approved. Will the Government move an amendment in advance of the decision on the motion? As it stands, the motion refers to amendments Nos. "500 to 450", which could cause confusion in terms of the intervening amendments.

I have had a long struggle against the use of guillotines, which have become routine for Governments. The present Government in particular are not weighing sufficiently carefully what they are doing. For many years—back to the 1930s—the House has been concerned about Henry VIII clauses in Bills. Now we have a Government who, like Henry VIII, believe that any proclamation of the King should be law.

Effectively, this motion is a proclamation. Within the first set of amendments to be considered, Nos. 213 to 422 deal with measures relating to London Transport. Effectively, these make up an additional Bill. Under any other Government, these measures would have made a separate, free-standing Bill. We know that that is the Government's own view; they would not have constructed a Bill which omitted such a fundamental principle if they held that the measures should be part of the original Bill.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend agree that, taking what he has just said together with the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) about the proportion of the Bill considered in relative detail in Committee and the enormous number of amendments to be added with no consideration at all, this could set a dangerous precedent that could be used by a Government who might be tempted to put an entirely new Bill into one that had received detailed consideration and to push it through under a guillotine with no consideration at all? [*Interruption.*] Does that worry my hon. Friend?

Mr. Shepherd: And how! Clearly, this matter concerned the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), who said that it was the constitutional duty of this House to debate. I do not demur from that. Any understanding of the role of Executive Government and the function of the House of Commons comes down to the fundamental basic job of the House of Commons, which is to debate the public measures and policies put forward by the Executive. In this case, the Executive have decided to create what could be a free-standing Bill in its own right, insert it into the original Bill in the House of Lords and present it to this Chamber. [*Interruption.*] The Under-Secretary may or may not agree, and I am happy that he is participating—like Back-Bench Members—in this debate. Could he give us a greater insight into the use of the guillotine?

I am becoming alarmed by the way in which the Government believe that their proclamations are law, and by their disregard for the purposes and processes of this House. I have seen Governments of a different colour nodding their head at that idea. The guillotine is constructed so closely—apart from the misprint, which I accept—that the motion states that the House

"doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments."

We know full well that we shall not be able to debate all the amendments, simply because of the scarcity of time allocated to do so by a majority of Labour Members. However, the guillotine is being used as a device to prevent us even from voting against provisions that we may judge to be inappropriate or wrong or as giving a wrong balance to the legislation. Is that a development in the employment of guillotine motions?

The Government will eventually stand in front of the public at a general election, but it takes a long time for it to become widely known that important issues of substance are no longer at the core of Members' role in addressing—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster does—vital London constituency issues. Because of the nature of some of the amendments, I, too, now have vital constituency issues to address in the Bill. The issue of road user charges is an important one in principle for people living in Aldridge–Brownhills or anywhere else in the west midlands. Nevertheless, the provision has simply been driven into the Bill, with no opportunity properly to discuss it.

Mr. Bercow: I do not know whether my hon. Friend heard the Minister for Housing and Planning sedentarily comment that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was paranoid. In the light of that sedentary interjection, does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister now has a duty to tell us whether hon. Members' treatment today is intended to be an isolated case and will not be repeated, or whether it is now to become common practice, and, if so, whether he has the audacity to think that none of us should be remotely concerned about it?

Mr. Shepherd: My hon. Friend is, of course, right. He used the word paranoid. We often in our debates make allegations, become excited and make claims about other

[Mr. Shepherd]

hon. Members that do not always bear scrutiny—and without scrutiny, we shall not able to appreciate the folly of expressions that we sometimes use.

Much more important than characterising each of us as trying to represent our narrow constituency interests, however, is whether we are truly able to discuss the substance of matters that will have a bearing on our constituents.

I know—because of the good grace of my colleagues, the "Today" programme and other sources—that the Minister for Housing and Planning is running the campaign of a candidate in the London mayoral election. We know that the hon. Gentleman's sympathies are not so disdainful of the House—surely he must know that, in normal times, the Government's proposed use of this guillotine, and the huge transformations effected in the Bill, would be thought most inappropriate.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman—who is always assiduous in dealing with respect for the rights of the House—has considered one supplementary point. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) commented that the House is expected to consider, in two days, about 90 new clauses and about 10 schedules—some of which are pages long, and some of which, in both their general and detailed provision, have huge financial implications. I have never known the House to be expected to consider 90 new clauses and 10 schedules at this stage in a Bill's passage, and I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman has, either.

Mr. Shepherd: The hon. Gentleman makes his point well. The issue is also profoundly important to him and his constituents. We know how assiduously he—like many hon. Members—works on behalf of his constituents, and that every hon. Member who has spoken in this debate has a regard for that duty. That was why I started my remarks by mentioning—I know that Ministers will think it was intemperate—Henry VIII provisions and the concept of governing the United Kingdom by statutory instruments which generally are not seriously scrutinised by the House, as there is no opportunity to debate them. Long years ago, the practice was said to be inappropriate, and it was said that it would be excluded from the practices of the House.

In truth, we understand that, in great Bills and in great Departments of State, there is a need to tailor measures to the needs of the day. However, in the current case, we are creating entirely new legislation without allowing the House even to consider it.

Mr. Redwood: I wonder whether my hon. Friend agrees with other Opposition Members that it is particularly worrying that the Bill should be guillotined and the debate curtailed when the Government are so unable to get things right—when there are so many changes; when the Order Paper is incorrect; when Ministers gave the wrong figure for the length of previous debate; and when their only argument against me is that I voted to abolish the Greater London council—although I never voted to do so, if for no other reason than I was not even an hon. Member at the time?

Mr. Shepherd: My right hon. Friend well justifies the Front-Bench position that he holds.

In summary, there is no point. We know that in truth, this is part of a bigger play. The Government are coming to the end of a parliamentary Session—but that is not the Opposition's fault; that aspect of the timetable was not unknown. The Government have been aware for most of the year that at some time in November the Queen will open a new Session of Parliament. The rejigging of business, with the leitmotif that a Weatherill amendment may or may not be included in another piece of legislation, condenses an enormously important Bill.

As it happens, I never believed in the Greater London Authority Bill. The referendum demonstrated that there was not what one could call consent or agreement to it. For the Government to present us with such a guillotine, and with the extraordinary contention that we may not even vote, other than once, on the whole of what comes under the proposition

"That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments"

is truly an execution.

Mr. Forth: My I bring some solace to my hon. Friend? My understanding is that we have the possibility of a reassuringly large number of Divisions, of which my hon. Friend and others may wish to avail themselves, within the first grouping of amendments, which we must finish by 8 o'clock. Notwithstanding the fact that the time for debate is inadequate, my hon. Friend can be reassured that he may be able to express his view in the Division Lobby on a surprisingly large number of occasions.

Mr. Shepherd: But those may not be the occasions of my choice.

I will scrutinise what my right hon. Friend says and support him in his endeavour, but if he is correct, that means that we may be unable to discuss any of the amendments scheduled for debate after 8 o'clock, if we are voting on the other amendments—[*Interruption.*] The Minister for Housing and Planning pointing in the general direction of another part of the House does not constitute an argument. That is not what debate in the Chamber is about.

I am outraged, as many other people will be if they understand what is happening. Amendments Nos. 426 to 498, 500 to—as is still written on the Order Paper—450, 542 to 702, 704 to 792, and 794 to 820, may be excluded from debate because hon. Members are doing the appropriate business of the House, which is voting on matters that the Government suggest should be public policy, in some instances with the force of law.

That is wrong, and the Government should know it. They should know that, slowly, their intolerance concerning parliamentary procedures and processes—that means debate by elected representatives—will bring them into disrepute.

4.18 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): There is something rather predictable about such debates, and I suppose that that explains the smile on the Minister's face. Governments govern and Oppositions talk, and if Oppositions were allowed to go on talking they would talk for ever. That is why, for the past 100 years, Governments have always preserved the right to guillotine in the end.

However, we are deluding ourselves if we believe that we are living in the same sort of Parliament as existed in earlier times. The political set-up then was largely amateur, there was little legislation, and most Members of Parliament were experts in their field. When it was necessary to guillotine legislation, it was usually on matters that—

It being forty-five minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the supplemental allocation of time motion, MADAM SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [13 January.]*

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 150.

Division No. 295] **[4.19 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine (Chester)
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John

Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Jacqui Lait and
Mr. James Cran.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Order of the House of 13th January 1999 relating to the Greater London Authority Bill be supplemented as follows:

Lords Amendments

1.—(1) Proceedings on further Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion at ten o'clock.

(2) The remaining Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order, namely:

Nos. 41 to 126, 499, 127 to 212, 703, 213 to 422, 541, 793, 423 to 425, 426 to 498, 500 to 540, 542 to 702, 704 to 792 and 794 to 820.

(3) Each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

TABLE

Lords amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Nos. 41 to 126, 499, 127 to 212, 703, 213 to 422, 541, 793 and 423 to 425	8.00 p.m.
Nos. 426 to 498, 500 to 450, 542 to 702, 704 to 792 and 794 to 820	10.00 p.m.

2.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1.

(2) The Speaker shall—

(a) put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, a single Question on any further Amendments of the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Lords Amendment or, as the case may be, in the Lords Amendment as amended;

(b) put forthwith a single Question on any Amendments moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment followed by the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in their Amendment, or as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended;

(c) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in a Lords Amendment;

(d) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(3) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments, the Speaker shall put forthwith a single Question on any Amendments moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to the Lords Amendment.

Subsequent stages

3. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

4. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

5. For the purpose of bringing these proceedings to a conclusion the Speaker shall—

(a) put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided, and the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on or relevant to any of the remaining items in the Lords Message; and

(c) put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Reasons Committee

6. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

7.—(1) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

(2) Proceedings in the Committee shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion 30 minutes after their commencement.

(3) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with sub-paragraph (2), the Chairman shall—

(a) first put forthwith any Question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not been decided; and

(b) then put forthwith successively Questions on motions which may be made by a Minister of the Crown for assigning a Reason for disagreeing with the Lords in one of their Amendments.

(4) The proceedings of the Committee shall be reported without any further Question being put.

Miscellaneous

8. This paragraph applies to—

(a) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments;

(b) proceedings on any further Message from the Lords; and

(c) proceedings of the kind mentioned in paragraph 6.

9. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies.

10. Proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

11. If proceedings on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House would, by virtue of Standing Order No. 24 (Urgent matters), commence at a time when proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies are in progress, the proceedings on the Motion shall be postponed to the conclusion of the proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies.

12. No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which any proceedings are taken; and if a Minister makes any such Motion, the Question on the Motion shall be put forthwith.

13. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

14. If a Minister of the Crown makes a Motion for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order, the Question on the Motion shall be put forthwith and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Motion.

15. If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the conclusion of any proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Orders of the Day

Greater London Authority Bill

Lords amendments further considered.

Clause 37

THE MAYOR'S MONTHLY REPORT TO THE ASSEMBLY

Lords amendment: No. 41, in page 22, line 2, after ("three") insert ("clear working")

4.30 pm

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 42 to 44, 46, 49 to 53, 58 to 80, 83, 86, 92 to 94, 97 to 102, 116, 117, 576, 581, 636 to 639, 642, 643 and 645.

Mr. Hill: This group of amendments makes provision for various matters connected with meetings and the procedures for them. On the first four issues that they cover, the amendments are direct responses to concerns raised during the passage of the Bill, and in particular to views expressed in the other place.

Amendments Nos. 41, 42 and 46 extend from three days to three clear working days the interval between the mayor submitting a report to the Assembly and the meeting at which the report is considered.

Amendments Nos. 43, 44, 61, 83, 116 and 117 make provision for written questions so that the mayor and Greater London Authority staff who may be questioned at Assembly meetings can provide answers in writing when oral answers are not practicable. The amendments also ensure that the text of questions and answers will be open to public inspection in the same way as the minutes of the meeting.

Amendments Nos. 49 to 53 remove the requirements to use the names "state of London debate" and "People's Question Time" while leaving both as defined terms in the Bill. They also place duties on the mayor to decide the form and procedure for both events, following consultation with the Assembly.

Lords amendments Nos. 60 to 64 replace the requirement for the Assembly to hold monthly meetings with one to hold 10 meetings a year. Those meetings must be no less than 28 days apart and may cover matters in addition to the mayor's report. They also clarify that the Assembly may hold any additional meetings that it chooses.

Lords amendments Nos. 69 and 78 make express provision for minutes of Assembly meetings. Lords amendments Nos. 65, 67 and 68, 86, 93, 636 to 639, 642, 643 and 645 provide for the Assembly to take decisions by a simple majority of those present and voting at a meeting, except where there is express provision to the contrary.

Lords amendments Nos. 70 to 76 make detailed provision for the Assembly to delegate the discharge of its functions to sub-committees and, in certain circumstances, to members of the Authority's staff.

Finally, Lords amendments Nos. 77, 79, 80, 92, 94, 97, 98 to 102, 576 and 581 expressly provide for the establishment of committees and sub-committees of the Assembly to which the Assembly may delegate its functions under clause 46(1)(a), and for the establishment of advisory committees.

Mr. Simon Hughes: We may have views on many groups of amendments, but for the reasons that Opposition Members made clear in the previous debate, we will not comment on many because we would not then be able to contribute to debates on, for example, London transport. The absence of such comments is not to be taken as a lack of interest or a lack of suggestions as to how things might have been done better.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): My point is generic, but it is right to raise it now. The Minister talked about the "state of London debate" and the "mayor of London". I think that it should be called the "state of Greater London debate" because that means a lot to my constituents in what used to be called outer London.

Mr. Hill: As a result of provisions now in the Bill, the Assembly will be able to do exactly that and widen the title of the debate to "Greater London" if it so desires.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I think that the Minister misunderstood my point, which concerned not what the Assembly can discuss, but the title "state of London" or "mayor of London".

Mr. Hill: I am sorry if I did not make the position clear. The Assembly can change the description of the debate to "state of Greater London" if it wishes.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 42 to 44 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 45, in page 22, line 23, at end insert—

("(b) a functional body,

(c) a member of a functional body, or

(d) a member of staff of a functional body,

except as provided by subsection (4A) below.

(4A) Where—

(a) the Mayor receives advice from a person falling within paragraph (b), (c) or (d) of subsection (4) above, and

(b) the functional body mentioned in that paragraph is the Metropolitan Police Authority or the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority,

the Mayor is not relieved by subsection (4) above from any requirement to disclose the advice, if or to the extent that the advice falls within subsection (4B) below.

(4B) Advice given to the Mayor by a functional body falls within this subsection if it has been disclosed—

(a) at a meeting of, or of a committee or sub-committee of, the functional body at a time when the meeting was open to members of the public by virtue of Part VA of the Local Government Act 1972 (access to meetings and documents); or

(b) in a document which has been open to inspection by members of the public by virtue of that Part of that Act.

(4C) Any reference in this section to a member of staff of a functional body includes a reference to an officer or employee of that body.")

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 81, 82, 84, 85, 87 to 91 and 96.

Mr. Raynsford: This group of amendments covers the openness arrangements for the Authority and clarifies the Assembly's power to summons. It completes the provisions for privacy of advice to the mayor, extending them to advice from functional bodies and ensuring that such advice is not disclosed as a background paper for an Assembly meeting. It makes it clear that the openness arrangements in clause 48 apply to Assembly committees and sub-committees. It places a duty on the Assembly not to disclose certain types of commercial information relating to Transport for London and the London development agency. It makes express provision for the Assembly to summon former chairmen and members of functional bodies, and makes it clear that the clause 48 openness arrangements, with appropriate modifications, apply to the power to summons hearings.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I have a simple question for the Minister. Can he say whether, when this Bill becomes law, the facts contained in advice to Ministers will be available to the public? It is a straightforward freedom of information question. I understand the point about advice on what the mayor and Assembly should do, but will the facts compiled in preparing such advice be available to the public?

Mr. Brooke: The subject of advice is contained in amendment No. 45. As the Minister will recall, the issue of confidential advice to the mayor was included in neither the Green Paper nor the White Paper, although I acknowledge that it was included in the Bill. The hon. Gentleman will recall that, on 4 February, in a paving suggestion on what was then clause 37, I raised the subject in anticipation of clauses 51, 56 and 59 of the Bill as it was then.

On 9 February, I raised the question, substantively, of confidential advice from the 10 members of the cabinet and the two special advisers. In the Minister's reply, he widely extended the range of those whose advice would remain confidential. I said:

"I am extremely grateful to the Minister. However, I am simply asking—I am quite certain that he will satisfy me with a single sentence—what legislative cover there is for those other than the 12, to whom he has just referred?"

Although *Hansard* does not relate that he did so after receiving a paper from his officials, the Minister replied:

"The answer is that we shall be tabling amendments to clarify that issue."

He was then kind enough to note:

"The right hon. Gentleman has raised an important point, which we shall ensure is covered by amendments tabled later in our proceedings."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 9 February 1999; c. 340.]

Subsequently and privately, the Minister revealed to me how the matter had occurred; I shall not embarrass anyone by divulging what it was. However, I did look forward to seeing the amendments. They did not arrive on Report in this place, nor in Committee in the Lords. Eventually, they arrived, on 14 October, on Report in the Lords—more than eight months after the Minister's commitment that the Government would table them. They were then withdrawn by Lord Whitty on Report, and were finally introduced into the Bill at the very last possible moment, on Third Reading in the Lords on 1 November, after almost nine months' gestation.

Given the unhappiness of many people in local government about the provisions, the Government's handling of the matter does not inspire confidence. It will serve as the most vivid of indices that the Government made the Bill up as they went along.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) raised two issues. First, the objective that we tried to achieve through the amendments—and which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is satisfied has been achieved in them—is to distinguish between advice to the mayor and background information that should be properly and readily available. That is also one explanation in regard to the question put by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), who, in the nicest possible way, complains about the length of time taken to give effect to the commitments that I gave in Committee.

It is a difficult task to ensure that there is a proper distinction between advice and background information. We did not want unduly to fetter access to information through giving too broad a definition of advice. In response to points made by noble Friends of the right hon. Gentleman in another place, it is precisely for that reason that we have introduced the latest set of amendments. We want to try to ensure that the privacy of advice to the mayor is respected, while there is the greatest possible access to information and background papers.

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful to the Minister for his answer. He may plead that the drafting powers of the Department were so entirely occupied that it took eight months for the matter to come up on Report in the Lords. However, if matters come up earlier, Members of this and the other place have the opportunity to improve legislation in the way that the Minister has just described. If the amendments are not tabled, such an opportunity does not exist.

Mr. Raynsford: I accept the principle of the right hon. Gentleman's comments; I hope that he will accept that that was achieved in practice. We have reached our objective of ensuring that the provisions of secrecy apply—contrary to what the right hon. Gentleman said, those provisions were covered in the White Paper. We pointed out that the advice to the mayor would be covered by the provisions of the Whitehall code, rather than the local government code. We are concerned to give effect to those provisions while ensuring that there is the maximum openness on all background information.

4.45 pm

Mr. Brooke: If the Minister reads the exchanges in Committee, he will see that he explained why these matters were not discussed in the Green Paper and the White Paper, but emerged only when the Bill was published.

Mr. Raynsford: I do not want to get into a lengthy debate with the right hon. Gentleman about matters covered in Committee. I accept that the matters we are discussing were not covered in the Green Paper and, no doubt, that is the issue we debated several months ago. However, the Government are committed to the Whitehall model, in which the privacy of advice to the mayor is guaranteed, but which is also an openness model in which there is maximum access to background information. That is what the amendments would achieve. It has been difficult to arrive at the right definition, but we are satisfied that we have done so, having listened to the views expressed in Standing Committee and in another place.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 46 to 94 agreed to.

Clause 52

PROCEDURE FOR REQUIRING ATTENDANCE

Lords amendment: No. 95, in page 29, line 14, leave out ("Chief Administrative Officer of the Authority") and insert

("head of the Authority's paid service")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 103 to 114, 118 to 123 and 158.

Mr. Raynsford: The amendments appear complex, but I am pleased to be able to reassure the House that their appearance is deceptive. Amendment No. 95 simply anticipates an amendment to clause 61, which removes the requirement to call the head of paid service the chief administrative officer.

Amendments Nos. 121 and 123 would clarify the respective roles of the mayor and the Assembly in the provision of resources for the head of paid service and the monitoring officer. The amendments would provide for the mayor to provide accommodation and other resources for the two officers, and for the Assembly to provide their staff.

Amendments Nos. 118, 122 and 158 provide for the head of paid service, the monitoring officer and the chief finance officer to be appointed as members of staff under the provisions of clause 56(2) of the Bill. That prevents those offices being held by staff appointed by the mayor. The procedures for handling reports submitted to the Authority by either the head of paid service or the monitoring officer are also provided for in the amendments.

The provision in the Bill requiring the head of paid service should be known as the chief administrative officer has been criticised as being unduly prescriptive. We agree, so the requirement would be deleted by amendment No. 120.

Amendments Nos. 103 to 105 are drafting amendments that would reinforce the need for the Assembly to consult the mayor about the appointments of GLA staff which he or she has made, prior to making its own appointments.

Amendment No. 106 disapplies the provisions of section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which would impose restrictions on the remuneration that could be paid to the mayor's political advisers. Amendment No. 107 is a consequential amendment.

Amendment No. 108 adds the London development agency to the list of bodies which are to be treated as a local authority for the purposes of the politically restricted posts provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Amendment No. 109 deletes references to the Metropolitan police authority and the London fire and emergency planning authority, because they are already covered by the 1989 Act.

Amendments Nos. 110 to 112 are drafting amendments, designed to make it clear that, when the mayor appoints one of his or her staff to the board of either the London development agency or Transport for London, it will be on an unpaid basis.

Amendments Nos. 113 and 114 apply the provisions of Section 2 of the 1989 Act to the chief finance officer of Transport for London and the chief executive of the London development agency.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 96 to 123 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 124, after clause 65, to insert the following new clause—*Power of Authority to promote or oppose Bills in Parliament*—

.—(1) The Authority may—

(a) promote a local Bill in Parliament for any purpose which is for the public benefit of the inhabitants of, or of any part of, Greater London; or

(b) oppose any local Bill in Parliament which affects any such inhabitants.

(2) Section 70 of the Local Government Act 1972 (prohibition on promoting Bills for changing local government areas etc) shall have effect in relation to the Authority as it has effect in relation to a local authority.

(3) The functions conferred on the Authority by subsection (1) above shall be functions of the Authority which are exercisable by the Mayor acting on behalf of the Authority.

(4) The functions conferred on the Authority by subsection (1)(a) above are exercisable subject to, and in accordance with, the provisions of Schedule *(Promotion of Bills in Parliament by the Authority)* to this Act.

(5) Before exercising the functions conferred on the Authority by subsection (1)(b) above, the Mayor shall consult the Assembly.

(6) No payment shall be made by the Authority (whether acting by the Mayor, the Assembly or the Mayor and Assembly acting jointly) to the Mayor or an Assembly member for acting as counsel or agent in promoting or opposing a Bill under this section.

(7) A London borough council or the Common Council may contribute towards the expenses of the Authority in promoting a local Bill in Parliament.")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 125, 126, 226, 227, 634, 704, 741 and 744.

Mr. Raynsford: The amendments provide the Greater London Authority, Transport for London and the London

development agency with the power to promote local Bills, and Transport for London with the power to promote and oppose orders under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

The amendments ensure that any local legislation promoted by the GLA is subject to consultation and that, where it affects the exercise of statutory functions of one or more London local authorities, a consent regime is followed.

The amendments were the subject of careful consultation with representatives of local government in London and with the authorities in both Houses before they were tabled, and were warmly welcomed when they were introduced in another place. We subsequently amended them slightly to ensure consistency of terminology across the provisions.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Liberal Democrats support the amendments. Have the Government legislated to give other development agencies or authorities in England the same Bill-promoting power?

Mr. Raynsford: I am not aware of such legislation, but I shall look into the matter and write to the hon. Gentleman. This power relates specifically to the provisions for London.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 125 and 126 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 499 disagreed to.

Government amendment in lieu of the Lords amendment agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 127, before clause 67, to insert the following new clause—*Amounts for different categories of dwellings*—

. In section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (amounts for different categories of dwellings) there shall be added at the end—

"(10) Where the major precepting authority in question is the Greater London Authority, subsections (2)(b) and (4) above shall have effect as if the references to sections 43 to 47 below were references to the appropriate Greater London provisions.

(11) In this section, "the appropriate Greater London provisions" means—

(a) sections 70 to 75 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 and section 47 below; or

(b) in the case of calculations by way of substitute, sections 70, 71 and 73 to 75 of, and Schedule 6 to, that Act and section 47 below.'")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 141, 146, 149, 167 to 169, 559, 644, 656 and 795.

Mr. Raynsford: The amendments make minor drafting changes and additions to the finance provisions in the Bill. Amendment No. 127 simply corrects an oversight by amending section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The amendment ensures that section 30 includes a reference to the GLA's budget requirement and tax-setting provisions, which are set out in the legislation. This will require billing authorities to add to council tax bills the amounts calculated by the GLA under the budget requirement and tax-setting provisions of the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 141 and 146 remove unnecessary regulation-making powers from the Bill and make clear under which powers the regulations referred to in clauses 79 and 80 are to be made.

Amendment No. 168 amends section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to ensure that properties occupied by the functional bodies cannot be granted discretionary rate relief by billing authorities. As a major precepting authority, the GLA cannot be granted such relief.

The GLA and the functional bodies will be able to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board, as authorities whose capital finances are regulated under part IV of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Amendments Nos. 169 and 795 are necessary to give the commissioners a complementary power to lend money to the functional bodies.

Amendment Nos. 167 and 656 amend the Local Government Act 1999, which in turn amends the Local Government Finance Act 1992, so that references to the budget requirement and tax-setting provisions of the Greater London Authority Bill are accurate. The amendments are needed because of the insertion of new clauses into the Bill since the Local Government Act 1999 received Royal Assent.

Amendment No. 559 requires any subordinate legislation made by the Secretary of State under clause 317(1) to be approved by an affirmative resolution of each House of Parliament. Amendments No. 149 and 644 make minor changes in drafting to the Bill.

Sir Sydney Chapman: The amendments can loosely be described as drafting and miscellaneous amendments. At this point—and only at this point—I shall mention a matter that I raised in Committee.

For the first time in legislation—it is an historic development—we are to refer to a presiding officer, in this case of the GLA, as the "chair", rather than as the "chairman". To me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are not an inanimate object, but a chairman. Until now, in modern English usage, the word "chairman" has embraced the female, although we could refer to a woman chairman as "Madam Chairman".

Because I was outvoted, I have to accept that we shall refer to the presiding officer of the Greater London Assembly or the presiding officer of any of its committees as the "chair". The Bill draws upon many other Acts of Parliament, and every one of them refers to such a person as the "chairman". My simple question might now be obvious: do these 820 amendments cover the change of wording from "chairman" to "chair" in all the other legislation mentioned in the Bill—and if not, why not?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point which was debated at some length in Committee. We have adopted a pragmatic approach and

[Mr. Raynsford]

do not seek to change all references to the "chairman" in previous legislation. However, we think that it is right that the term "chair" should be used, and we do not accept the hon. Gentleman's view that this is an arcane issue. We are creating a new authority that is designed to appeal to the people of London as we move into the next millennium. We want to ensure that it is seen to be an open authority that is not hidebound by old conventions.

The terminology is not a point of substance. We have simply sought, in a pragmatic way, to create references that will be acceptable to the majority of the population in the years ahead.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 68

ISSUE OF PRECEPTS

Lords amendment: No. 128, in page 36, line 23, leave out from ("for") to end of line 25 and insert

("the reference to sections 43 to 47 below there shall be substituted a reference to the appropriate Greater London provisions;")

5 pm

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in amendment No. 131.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May I correct the Minister? We all sometimes get the order of amendments slightly wrong. On this occasion, the lead amendment is amendment No. 128.

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in amendment No. 127—I beg your pardon, Sir Alan—amendment No. 128.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 129, 130, 139, 142 to 145, 147, 148, 150 and 151.

Mr. Raynsford: Amendment No. 128 is a technical amendment, as are the associated amendments. They ensure that when the Authority makes substitute calculations, it does so by reference to the correct provisions, including schedule 6.

If the amendments were not made, the Bill would appear to require substitute calculations to be made in accordance with schedule 5. That, in practice, would prove impossible, as schedule 5 requires calculations to be made by the end of February each year, whereas the need for substitute calculations is unlikely to arise until after the end of February.

Schedule 6 instead provides the appropriate procedure and sets out the roles of mayor and Assembly in making substitute calculations The amendments make it clear that schedule 6 governs the procedure for making substitute calculations.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 129 and 130 agreed to.

Clause 73

CALCULATION OF BASIC AMOUNT OF TAX

Lords amendment: No. 131, in page 39, line 43, after ("report") insert ("or determination")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 132 to 138, 635 and 640.

Mr. Raynsford: The amendments, like the previous group—which may explain my confusion—are all minor technical amendments that clarify the duties of the mayor and Assembly in setting the GLA consolidated budget, and amend the Secretary of State's powers in the budget-setting process.

Amendment No. 635 is consequential to an amendment made to clause 29 at Commons Report stage. Clause 29 provides that any function of the authority is exercised by the mayor unless specified otherwise. The amendment clarifies that the duty of preparing the budget is shared between the mayor and Assembly, as set out in schedule 5.

Amendment No. 640 removes the Secretary of State's power to change the date of the last day of February by which the GLA's budget must be finalised. It responds to concerns expressed during the Bill's Committee stage in the other place. The Secretary of State will be able to move the 1 February date by which the mayor must present his or her draft consolidated budget to the Assembly. That will allow the Secretary of State to use his discretion in deciding whether to change the date by which the mayor must present the draft budget to take account of any delay in announcing the local government finance settlement.

Amendments Nos. 131 to 138 ensure that the Secretary of State will be able to set out the amounts of general GLA grant that he considers relate to police and non-police services in the determination in which the total amount of general GLA grant paid is set out. That is necessary because the general GLA grant will be the subject of a determination, not a report, and will therefore not be subject to an affirmative or negative resolution procedure. The other items of income used in the calculations of the basic amount of tax and of the special item are all the subject of a report.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 132 to 139 agreed to.

Clause 79

SUBSTITUTE CALCULATIONS UNDER SECTION 49 OF THE 1992 ACT

Lords amendment: No. 140, in page 44, line 20, leave out from ("Authority,") to ("any") in line 22 and insert—

("(i) the amount of any component budget requirement calculated under subsections (4) to (7) of section 70 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999,

(ii) the amount calculated under subsection (8) of that section, or

(iii)")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 152.

Mr. Raynsford: The amendment, and the associated amendment, No. 152, make minor clarifications to the mayor's powers and duties in relation to the GLA's single finance system.

Amendment No. 140 eliminates an unintended effect of the GLA's power to make substitute calculations. It ensures that the mayor and Assembly cannot re-allocate money from one GLA body to another during the financial year, except to ensure that the Metropolitan Police Authority budget is adequate, following a direction from the Secretary of State, or in the event of an emergency or disaster. The mayor and Assembly will thus, as had always been our intention, be able to use the power to make substitute calculations only to cut both the consolidated and component budgets. For example, a newly elected mayor may want to do that.

Amendment No. 152 amends a possible misunderstanding in respect of clause 105 as it left the House—namely, that the mayor is required to state for each functional body a minimum amount of capital grant he will pay to that body. That was not the intended effect. It was intended to leave the mayor free to decide what capital grant he makes to the functional bodies and to require him to specify an amount only when he decides to pay a body no less than a certain amount. The mayor will, of course, be able to specify in section B of the capital spending plan an amount of nil as the minimum amount of capital grant he will pay to a functional body. He is more likely simply to specify no amount if he has not reached a decision on a minimum amount. The clause as amended will raise no doubts about his ability to do that.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 141 to 153 agreed to.

Clause 112

PROPER FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION AND CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

Lords amendment: No. 154, in page 62, line 37, at end insert—

("( ) No person may be the chief finance officer of two or more relevant authorities at the same time.")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 155 to 157.

Mr. Raynsford: Amendment No. 154 and the associated amendments clarify the arrangements for appointing chief finance officers for the GLA and functional bodies.

Amendment No. 154 provides that no individual can be simultaneously the chief finance officer of the GLA and a functional body, or of two or more functional bodies. That is necessary to make it absolutely certain that the GLA and the functional bodies do not share chief finance officers. A key principle of the GLA's finance system is that each body is responsible for managing its own affairs once the GLA's consolidated budget has been set. Allowing bodies to share chief finance officers would have undermined that principle and could have caused conflicts of interest.

Amendments Nos. 155 and 156 provide that the Assembly appoints the GLA's chief finance officer and that the officer is designated from staff appointed by the Assembly rather than from staff appointed by the mayor. Without the amendments, the function of making the appointment would, by default, have fallen to the mayor.

Amendment No. 157 prohibits the mayor from being designated the chief finance officer of Transport for London. The Bill allows it to appoint one of its members, rather than a member of staff, as chief finance officer. As the mayor has the power to decide to chair Transport for London, he or she could be appointed as the body's chief finance officer. That would cause an unacceptable conflict of interest given the mayor's policy responsibilities for transport and powers of direction over Transport for London, and the chief finance officer's duty to ensure proper financial administration.

These amendments tidy the provisions to appoint chief finance officers of the GLA and functional bodies to ensure that they give full effect to our intentions.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 155 to 158 agreed to.

Clause 113

APPLICATION OF PART VIII OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988

Lords amendment: No. 159, in page 63, line 5, at end insert—

("(board) the London Pensions Fund Authority;"")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 160 to 166, 513, 514, 647 to 650, 652, 653 and 655.

Mr. Raynsford: You will be relieved to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is the last group of amendments that we shall consider before we discuss transport, which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will cover. The group includes two new clauses—amendments Nos. 513 and 514—and consequential amendments, which implement our White Paper commitment to bring the London Pensions Fund Authority under the democratic control of the GLA.

The LPFA, which is currently a quango accountable to the Secretary of State, administers former GLC pensions and employer liabilities and the pensions of certain other bodies admitted to the fund under the local government pension scheme regulations. It cannot be right that a body focused on London and affecting the lives of many people across London is not answerable in some way to a democratically elected authority.

Amendment No. 513 inserts a new clause providing for the mayor to comment each year on the LPFA's budget and on strategic plans drawn up by the body. Amendment

[Mr. Raynsford]

No. 514 inserts a clause transferring from the Secretary of State to the mayor responsibilities for the appointments and tenure of office of members of the LPFA, for determining their remuneration and for receiving reports and information. Amendments Nos. 159 to 166, 647 to 650, 652, 653 and 655 are consequential and deal with the auditing and accounts of the LPFA when it is brought under the authority of the GLA.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 160 to 169 agreed to.

Clause 124

THE MAYOR'S TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Lords amendment: No. 170, in page 67, line 35, after ("problems,") insert—

("(aa) shall specify a timetable for the implementation of the proposals contained in the transport strategy by virtue of paragraph (a) above,")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 171.

Mr. Hill: The amendments followed discussion in this House and another place about the provisions in the Bill in respect of transport for those with mobility problems.

My ministerial colleagues and I have received correspondence from people outside the House expressing concern that the Bill is not inclusive enough of the needs and views of users of accessible transport services. We considered the arguments carefully, both before and during the passage of the Bill. We recognised at an early stage that the special needs of those with mobility problems deserved particular attention. That is why, on introducing the Bill to Parliament, we included a specific provision requiring the mayor to include in his or her transport strategy proposals for the provision of transport accessible to those with mobility problems.

Although we believe that the existing Bill's provisions fully meet concerns over consultation with organisations representing elderly and disabled people, I recognise that there is still concern. We accept that there are advantages in giving a clear signal about the importance that we attach to those issues. Indeed, when we come to discuss the exemptions from congestion charging later in the debate we shall discuss other improvements that we have been able to make.

Amendment No. 171 requires the mayor, when preparing the transport strategy to consult groups representing persons with mobility problems. Amendment No. 170 requires that the mayor set out in the transport strategy a timetable for the implementation of his or her proposals for the provision of transport accessible to persons with mobility problems.

I should stress that the amendments are targeted specifically at the transport strategy, in recognition of the particular impact that the strategy will have on those with mobility problems. The amendments do not affect the provisions covering the mayor's other strategies. Taken together, they will ensure that transport for those with mobility problems will be a key element of the mayor's transport strategy.

We are committed to comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people. Accessible public transport within the framework of an integrated transport policy must be fundamental in delivering that commitment. The long-term goal must be to ensure that accessible transport is regarded as part of the mainstream transport infrastructure, not as an add-on. There are wider benefits in delivering accessible transport; for example, low-floor buses are easier for the whole travelling public, not just elderly and disabled people.

When I speak of accessible transport, I am not just referring to public transport. We must not forget that many Londoners with mobility problems rely on dedicated door-to-door transport services. The London White Paper set out our commitments in that area. Responsibility for the dedicated door-to-door services currently provided by the dial-a-ride and taxicard schemes will transfer to the new authority. The mayor's duty to include in the transport strategy proposals for accessible transport encompasses proposals for door-to-door services as well as public transport. The amendments further strengthen the provisions in the Bill for accessible transport for those with mobility problems.

Mr. Simon Hughes: We agree that amendment No. 170 adds something of value to the Bill. If one is to have a strategy that requires one to make transport accessible to disabled people, it is sensible to ensure that there is a timetable for doing so; otherwise, it will be based just on hope and aspiration. Those of us who regularly confront the issue of disabled people's frustration with public transport—which, as the Minister said, is linked to the private system—know that a strategy with no timetable would be of little worth.

5.15 pm

Is it the Minister's understanding that the provisions of Lords amendment No. 171 include river transport? If we are serious about integrating river transport, and if this is to be a transport strategy for London, we ought to consider how disabled people can also have access to river transport. It is no good our trying to promote it if, for many of our citizens, it remains as inaccessible as before.

I hope that I can have a positive answer to my question about Lords amendment No. 171, in return for my positive approbation for Lords amendment No. 170.

Mr. Hill: In response to the typically constructive and positive approach adopted by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), I am delighted to affirm that river services form part of the transport strategy for people with mobility problems, and that that is an entirely proper subject for the mayor and the Assembly to consider in devising a transport strategy for London.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 171 agreed to.

Clause 126

DUTIES OF LONDON BOROUGH COUNCILS ETC.

Lords amendment: No. 172, in page 68, line 21, at end insert—

("(4) In exercising any functions in relation to the management of roads or traffic in a Royal Park in Greater London the Secretary of State shall have regard to the transport strategy.

(5) In this section "Royal Park" means any park to which the Parks Regulation Act 1872 applies (see sections 1 and 3 of the Parks Regulation (Amendment) Act 1926).")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 372 and 414.

Mr. Hill: The amendments follow discussion in this House and in another place about the relationship between the Royal Parks Agency and local highway and traffic authorities in the context of road closures and other changes regarding highways and traffic. In the light of those discussions, we have amended the Bill to require the Royal Parks Agency to have regard to the mayor's transport strategy, and to introduce for the first time a statutory consultation arrangement between the royal parks and the local highways and traffic authorities.

Lords amendment No. 172 provides that the Secretary of State—which in practice means the Royal Parks Agency—must have regard to the mayor's transport strategy when carrying out any functions relating to the management of roads and traffic in a royal park.

Lords amendment No. 372 provides that, if the agency proposes to carry out functions that are likely to affect a road for which another authority is the highway authority, it must consult that authority. Similarly, if a highway authority proposes to carry out functions that are likely to affect a royal park, the authority must consult the agency. The one exception is that, when it would not be reasonably practicable for the agency to consult the highway authority—or vice versa—before the functions are carried out, each may go ahead and tell the other body afterwards.

Lords amendment No. 414 provides that, if the agency proposes to carry out functions that are likely to affect a road for which another authority is the traffic authority, the agency must consult the authority and Transport for London. Similarly, if a traffic authority proposes to carry out functions that are likely to affect a royal park, it must consult the agency. Again, the one exception is that, when it would not be reasonably practicable for the agency to consult the borough or Transport for London—or vice versa—before the functions are carried out, the agency or the traffic authority may go ahead and tell the other body afterwards.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I support the amendments. It is entirely right not only for local authorities and other bodies but for the Secretary of State, who is responsible for royal parks, to have regard to the mayor's transport strategy.

There are a number of main arteries in London that pass through the royal parks, the opening and closing of which can have a major impact on roads in their vicinity. I hope that, for that reason alone, the House will support the amendments.

Mr. Brooke: I, too, appreciate the moves that the Government have made. In Committee on 16 February, at column 599, in response to a mischievous and provocative speech by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)—I say that in friendly terms—I made paving reference to a point that I came back to on clause 179. In columns 963 and 964, I raised the problem of the lack of connection in traffic control between the royal parks and the rest of Greater London, including the adjacent local authorities. The then Minister for Transport in London, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) explained that there were no powers to enable the bridging of that gap.

The matter was debated twice in Committee in the Lords. On 19 October, Lord Whitty moved these amendments, which are an excellent development. It is a vindication of the parliamentary process that we have come to such a good solution—one that people surrounding the royal parks have been crying out for for ages. I salute the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions for being such a pleasure to do business with, in marked contrast with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which has cut funding to the royal parks, insisted that they must have a series of concerts, interrupting their quietude, and allowed a series of Albanian hot dog vendors to run riot in a manner that is liable to turn the royal parks into a version of Coney island. I unreservedly commend the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) for his kind words. I also pay tribute to the outstanding contribution made by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) on the issue. The Bill and the whole of London have benefited from it and we are very grateful to him.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 129

POWER OF THE MAYOR TO PREPARE A PLAN

Lords amendment: No. 173, in page 69, line 36, leave out from ("refuses") to ("unless") in line 39, and insert

("to approve under subsection (2) of section 128 above a local implementation plan, the London borough council which submitted the plan shall prepare a new local implementation plan and submit it to the Mayor under subsection (1) of that section")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 174 to 193.

Mr. Hill: When the clauses relating to local implementation plans were discussed in this House, we were pressed on why we had not included any provisions for review of the plans. We were also asked why the mayor could claim for the boroughs only reasonable

[Mr. Hill]

administrative expenses rather than all reasonable expenses, if he or she had to intervene to implement a plan. We agreed to reflect on those issues.

The amendments were added to the Bill in another place. I am sorry that so many amendments were required, but it is necessary to ensure that the same process is followed for a revised plan as for the original.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 174 to 193 agreed to.

Clause 135

STRUCTURE OF FARES AND SERVICES.

Lords amendment: No. 194, in page 72, line 36, at end insert

("or in pursuance of a transport subsidiary's agreement")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 195 to 212, 703 and amendments (a) to (e) thereto, 214, 215, 223 and amendment (a) thereto and motion to disagree, 224, 225, 228, 232 to 234, 235 and amendment (a) thereto, 236 to 238, 334, 336, 338, 346, 423, 565, 566, 572, 577, 582, 657, 659 to 696, 698 to 702, 712, 714, 715, 717 and 799 to 801.

Mr. Hill: The House is enormously grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I may say so, that was beautifully enunciated.

The amendments in this group are largely technical improvements to the detailed transport functions of the mayor and Transport for London. Some are reproductions of current statutory functions of London Transport—functions conferred on London Transport under legislation introduced by a Conservative Government. Some of them represent a positive reaction to points which have been raised in the other place.

Some concern new powers and duties to reflect the wider responsibilities of Transport for London and the integrated approach which it will be able to take to transport in the capital. The amendments are intended to be helpful, and do not alter the basic structure of the Bill.

I hope that it will assist the House—as I describe the general effect of these amendments—if I distinguish between those which give Transport for London its powers, those which impose duties and those which are editorial or technical in nature. It may also help if I give some illustrative examples of each type of amendment. I should mention that this group also includes a power for the Secretary of State to make regulations to enable the current tax status of Transport for London's predecessor bodies to be maintained once those bodies have transferred to Transport for London.

Let me deal first with the powers which this group of amendments gives to Transport for London. TfL will, of course, be a new organisation, but it will need to have many of the same powers as its predecessors. These amendments ensure that the relevant powers of London Transport are passed to Transport for London. For example, the amendments give it the power to make railway byelaws.

The amendments also allow Transport for London to run a transport museum and to pay grants to bodies such as the dial-a-ride companies. Those activities are of course already undertaken by London Transport, and will be continued by Transport for London. However, Transport for London will need not only to inherit the relevant powers of its predecessor bodies, but to have powers to discharge its wider statutory duties and to reflect the changing nature of transport provision. The amendments allow for that.

For example, the amendments give Transport for London the power to form joint venture companies and to provide transport facilities without itself having to run services to and from those facilities. The amendments recognise that Transport for London's responsibilities will not be limited to passenger transport. It will thus have the power to provide intermodal freight facilities—a point suggested by my noble Friend Lord Berkeley in the other place.

The duties imposed on Transport for London by the amendments relate primarily to the provision of information. Amendment No. 236 requires Transport for London annually to inform local authorities and the London Transport Users Committee of its plans for fares and services, and to publish details of its fares. Again, this is a reproduction of a current duty of London Transport. However, we have also given Transport for London a new duty—I ought to mention that we were prompted to do so by Conservative peers—to provide information to the public about the Transport for London public transport services. This duty builds upon the present travel information service provided by London Transport to its customers, and will assist in the delivery of the passenger transport information 2000 initiative to provide a national public transport information service during the course of next year.

We have made a number of editorial and technical changes. For example, we have included provisions allowing Transport for London to fulfil the contractual obligations of predecessor bodies so that there is no disruption to services. We have provided for Transport for London to make transfer schemes for the distribution of property among its subsidiaries, so that the mayor can structure Transport for London and its transport functions as he or she wishes.

Government amendments (a) to (e) to Lords amendment No. 703 make technical and consequential changes relating to the operation and the interpretation of the new schedule on Transport for London transfer schemes.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, these amendments complete the toolkit which Transport for London will need to deliver the mayor's vision for transport in the capital. I am conscious that, in the time available to us today, it might be inappropriate for me to describe the amendments in exhaustive detail, but I will try to answer any queries that hon. Members may have, either now or in writing.

Mr. Brake: I should like to speak specifically to Lords amendment No. 223, which Liberal Democrat Members oppose and on which we shall seek to divide the House.

First, however, I should point out that the Table Office has made a drafting error in our amendment (a). We have proposed omitting from "Secretary of State", in line 41, to "the", in line 42, as we accept that the mayor should be able to authorise the issue of shares, stock and—as we propose—bonds.

5.30 pm

London's transport system is undoubtedly in a shambles—we are able to see with our own eyes the evidence of that fact. Some months ago, I tabled a private notice question on delays on the underground between 1994–95 and 1998–99. The fact is that, in that period, delays increased by 25 per cent. or more. My own experience of travelling by bus, tube or train from Wallington to Westminster has also confirmed that delays have increased.

We have had very significant transport fare increases. Moreover, on 9 January, fares on the underground will increase by 2.5 per cent., whereas inflation is running well below that. The real fare increase, therefore, will be about 50 per cent. above inflation. Against that background, the mayor should be given all possible financial options so that he or she is able to invest the sums necessary to take our underground system from the 19th to the 21st century.

Liberal Democrat Members certainly welcome the Government's agreement that the mayor should be able to raise money in share issues—in Committee, we were pushing for such a provision—but we should also like the mayor to be given the option of issuing not only shares, but bonds. Our amendment (a) would provide the mayor with that option.

Around the world, there are many examples—New York is one—of transport systems that have been funded by bond issues. Many of the original tube lines were financed by bond issues. The mayor may need to use that financial option if the public-private partnership does not proceed—although hon. Members may not think that that is a possibility.

In a parliamentary question, I asked when the PPP contracts would be signed, and was told that they would be signed "when they are ready". That was a very helpful response, and I was pleased to hear that the contracts will not be signed before they are ready. The response continued:

> "We have learned the lessons of rail privatisation and will not impose a politically driven timetable at the expense of ensuring that the resulting deal is right."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1999; Vol. 337, c. 78.]

It is, therefore, entirely possible that the PPP will not proceed.

What if the PPP does not prove to offer best value and fails the public sector comparative test? Hon. Members may be thinking, "Surely that couldn't happen. Surely the Government have already confirmed that the PPP will pass the public sector comparative test before contracts are signed." However, I do not believe that that is the case. In a debate earlier this year, the then Minister for Transport said:

> "I have made it clear that, in the private-public partnership, the value-for-money proposal will be the criterion against which all our proposals are tested. The Government will not implement a public-private partnership unless we are entirely satisfied that it will secure best value for the taxpayer."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1999; Vol. 324, c. 413.]

At what point will the Government be able to confirm whether the PPP secures best value? Such questions have prompted our desire to provide the mayor with the additional financial option of issuing bonds, so that he or she will have fall-back funding if the PPP proposals should fall apart.

What exactly are the Government's objections to issuing bonds? Last week, in another place, we were given an explanation for their objection. The Government said that they believed that the PPP that they are putting together would prove to be better value than bond financing. I hardly consider that a ringing endorsement of the PPP—but it is not a damning criticism of bonds, either.

Having outlined the reasons why the Government should take on board our modest amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 223, I shall also speak in favour of another amendment in the group—amendment (a), tabled by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) to Lords amendment No. 235. That amendment seems sensible to us.

In my constituency of Carshalton and Wallington there is strong demand for transport infrastructure improvements. For instance, many residents would welcome the extension of the Croydon tramlink into Carshalton and Wallington, and on to Sutton. The amendment would allow the borough of Sutton to enter into discussions with Transport for London to provide such an extension.

I urge the Government at this late hour to accept our motion to disagree with Lords amendment No. 223. They have nothing to lose, and Londoners have much to gain.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I shall speak to amendment (a), tabled in my name to Lords amendment No. 235. Hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee will recall—or they may not—that I tabled an amendment then that would have allowed the mayor to enter into a voluntary arrangement with the City of London corporation for a voluntary contribution towards infrastructure projects in London. That was not a duplicitous plot to undermine the financial standing of the corporation—I wish that it had been—but simply an attempt to release resources for the benefit of London, especially for transport infrastructure projects.

The amendment built upon the attempts that we have made over the past 10 years to encourage voluntary agreements between the City of London corporation and Londonwide local government and service structures overall, to provide the necessary resources for the development of infrastructure projects, especially for transport but also for environmental purposes.

My amendment would build on Lords amendment No. 235, which would enable Transport for London to enter into agreements with the common council of the City of London corporation and London boroughs for the provision of transport services, but it would also clarify the fact that the definition should include transport infrastructure projects as well.

Hon. Members representing constituencies throughout London have made clear the need for long-term investment in transport infrastructure projects. The amendment would enable the same clarity to exist in relation to the question of where the resources will come from. I note that all three contenders for selection as Labour candidate for mayor have expressed support for

[Mr. John McDonnell]

the concept of "going to the City" to finance infrastructure projects in London, and within the definition of the City, I would include the City of London corporation itself.

I will have to be convinced during the debate of the reasons why the Government do not wish to accept the amendment to facilitate the issuing of bonds. I agree with those who say that we should maximise the flexibility for the new Greater London Authority, the mayor and Transport for London to draw upon a range of resources to fund transport developments in London.

I do not support the public-private partnership. I understand the arguments in favour of it that have been mobilised in the House and elsewhere, but there are elements of risk involved. Putting that to one side, however, even if the PPP were the best option for now, we would not wish to prevent a future administration from being able to draw upon other financial sources.

The amendment would provide the opportunity not only for shares to be issued but for bonds to be drawn upon. I shall need convincing of the reasons why we should rule that out in the long term. The Government may not want to support the idea now, but at some future stage it might give the mayor and the new strategic authority the necessary flexibility. We should not use the Bill to prohibit that, and if I am not convinced by the Government's reasons, I shall support the amendment in the Lobby.

Mr. Hill: I shall deal first with amendment (a) tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) to Lords amendment No. 235. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his amendment, but I hope that I can persuade him that it is unnecessary.

Amendment No. 235 provides for the retention of the existing powers of London local authorities other than the GLA to procure additional rail services and facilities from the franchising director and train operating companies, and of local authority powers to enter into agreements with Transport for London for additional services and facilities. Those powers are currently available to London local authorities under sections 28 and 59 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984.

Amendment (a) would mean that the powers of London local authorities would include the ability to enter into agreements for transport infrastructure projects, as well as for facilities and services. Local authorities' powers under amendment No. 235 are really designed to allow them to secure services and facilities that would not otherwise be provided by Transport for London or rail operators. For example, a London borough might use those powers to arrange for additional bus services to cater for a special event. However, transport infrastructure projects are neither facilities nor services, although it is possible that a project might result in facilities or services being provided. I fear that amendment (a) confuses the idea of a project, which could require new facilities and services, with the provision of those facilities and services. Local authorities do not necessarily need powers to embark on a project, but they do need powers to do things in connection with those projects. Amendment No. 235 will give them the necessary powers.

I should also mention that any proposal for a large transport infrastructure project could require statutory authority, either by means of a Bill or by the making of an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 by the Secretary of State. London boroughs and Transport for London have the power to promote applications for such orders. Accepting amendment (a) could create some uncertainty in that area, and I therefore urge my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington to withdraw it.

Mr. McDonnell: I am happy to withdraw my amendment on the basis of a simple statement from my hon. Friend. Under the existing proposed legislation, will the mayor, the authority or Transport for London have the ability to enter into a voluntary arrangement with the City of London corporation, or a London borough, to fund a transport infrastructure project? I give the example of the City of London corporation because it proposed the idea some seven or eight years ago, and intimated that it would be willing to enter into a voluntary agreement on such projects with any new organisation or with the Government.

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend asks whether the mayor can enter into agreements with City institutions or London local authorities for the financing of a major infrastructure project—for example, crossrail. The answer is yes, in principle. The Bill will give the mayor and Transport for London extensive powers—broadly similar to those that London Transport has now—to enter into agreements for transport purposes. Of course, much would depend on the precise form of the proposed agreements, and that would no doubt need to be looked at carefully if and when a proposal emerged.

Transport for London will of course be free to negotiate private finance initiative deals, to finance transport projects, for example, as long as they are considered off balance sheet. In other words, if sufficient risk is transferred to the private sector, the borrowing will not score against public expenditure or need credit approvals.

Under Lords amendment No. 235 local authorities will be able to enter into agreements with Transport for London regarding the provision of transport services and facilities. That will provide considerable scope for undertaking joint projects. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington will be satisfied by those wide-ranging reassurances.

5.45 pm

Mr. McDonnell: It will take just one more sentence to satisfy me. My understanding of what my hon. Friend has said is that it will be perfectly appropriate for the new mayor and Authority, after next May's election, to approach the City of London corporation and request a voluntary agreement to fund crossrail, for example, although a more important example might involve the Central line extension to Uxbridge. Will my hon. Friend confirm that my understanding is correct?

Mr. Hill: I think that I have answered that question already by saying yes, in principle.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) asserted several times that, under some new arrangement, the mayor will be permitted to float shares. I wish to emphasise that the mayor will not have that power. Although Transport for London can form

companies, it cannot sell the shares in those companies if to do so would result in the contracting out of the operations of underground trains or stations.

On amendment No. 223(a)—

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman asks to intervene a little early in my explanation, and I have to note that he was not in the Chamber for the beginning of this debate.

Mr. Hughes: I was in the Chamber, but I was somewhere else. *[Interruption.]* I was on another Bench. Will the Minister clarify what he said about the mayor? My understanding of the Government amendment agreed to in the Lords, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) referred, is that the Government were happy to accept the argument advanced by Opposition Members in Committee. That amendment appears to propose that the mayor rather than the Secretary of State would have the power to raise shares. Will the Minister confirm that that is indeed what is proposed?

Mr. Hill: I am pleased to clarify that point. The purpose of the amendment is to transfer to the mayor the power of the Secretary of State to authorise the issue of shares by Transport for London to a person other than Transport for London or its subsidiaries. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman, and I am sorry that I did not spot him when he was hiding elsewhere in the Chamber.

The Bill already confers powers on the Greater London Authority and its functional bodies to borrow money within the existing local authority finance framework. That includes borrowing by issuing bonds, as well as borrowing through credit approvals, entering into a private finance initiative arrangement or making a case for additional funding to the Greater London Authority transport grant.

Under the current local government finance regime, a bond issued by one of those bodies would count as public borrowing. It would need to be secured against all the revenues of the authority and could not be secured against a particular revenue stream. A bond issued by a Greater London Authority body would be a more expensive way of raising money than if the Government borrowed the money themselves. In practice, local authorities rarely borrow by issuing bonds, because it is cheaper and easier to borrow from the Public Works Loans Board.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington and my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington both asked why neither the Greater London Authority nor Transport for London might issue bonds secured normally against a revenue stream from a congestion-charging regime. The answer is that borrowing through a bond secured against the revenues from a congestion-charging regime still counts as public expenditure under the current local government finance regime.

As I have already explained, bonds must currently be secured against all the revenues of the authority and not just against one revenue stream. There would be no advantage in allowing borrowing secured against the revenue from a single project, such as a congestion-charging scheme, as it would offer lenders less security and would cost more. However, we are reviewing the local government finance regime. In particular, we are examining the possibility of allowing local authorities to borrow, subject only to limits relating the level of debt to their future income, and the use of prudential indicators to regulate borrowing.

We plan to publish a consultation paper in the spring, following completion of the review. The Greater London Authority, along with local authorities in general, will, of course, benefit from any changes that may follow the review, although it is too early to say what those may be or when they might be put into effect.

Mr. Hughes: I understand the Minister's argument but—and my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) is more expert than I am—it may not be sufficient. The Minister that the Government plan to issue a consultation document in the spring after the review. But any decision may be made too late for the new GLA, which will be elected in May and in power from July, if it is to address what is an immediate issue. That is a defect in the Minister's argument, because the power may come too late for the GLA to act.

Mr. Hill: Let me seek to interpret the hon. Gentleman's point. I take it that the immediate issue to which he refers is new investment in the London underground system. Let me reassure the hon. Members for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and for Carshalton and Wallington that good progress has been made in implementing the London Underground public-private partnership proposals since my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced them in March last year.

On 7 October, London Transport announced that five consortiums had pre-qualified for the infrastructure contracts, and would be invited to tender for the deep tube infrastructure contracts. Invitation to tender documents were issued on 19 October, and bids are due back by March 2000. We are confident that the scheme is going ahead and that it will be successful.

Mr. Hughes: I understand the Government's plan, but some of us, including Conservative Members, are not happy with it. If the mayor and Assembly elected in May have different ideas about the project, does the Minister accept that the rejection the amendment would preclude the mayor and Authority from raising money in the short term by a bond issue, unless the Government had decided to change their whole policy on local government financing?

Mr. Hill: The blunt truth is that they would be precluded in the short term. However, the Government are confident about the timetable, and that achievement of the London Underground PPP project is well on course, so that it will be delivering to London, as scheduled, in the course of 2001.

In conclusion, I hope that the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington will be content with my reply and will not seek to press the amendment to a Division.

Mr. Brake *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot speak a second time. I was hoping that the amendment would be moved formally at a later stage. Is the hon. Gentleman seeking the leave of the House?

Mr. Brake: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have listened carefully to the Minister's

[Mr. Brake]

response. He gave no clear reason why the mayor should not have the flexibility to issue bonds secured against a number of revenue streams, not necessarily a single revenue stream. I believe that many of his objections to the amendment are Government-imposed restrictions relating to the public sector borrowing requirement and the Government's timetable for future business. I am afraid, therefore, that we ought to press the amendment to the vote.

I am disappointed that Conservative Members have not supported us on the issue, as I do not believe that there are any reasons to restrict the mayor's flexibility unnecessarily. The mayor needs to have as many options as possible for raising funds for transport.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 195 to 212 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Lords amendment No. 703 and Government amendments (a) to (d) thereto, and consequential Government amendment (e) agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 213 to 215 agreed to.

Clause 141

RESTRICTIONS ON THE DISPOSAL OF LAND

Lords amendment: No. 216, in page 76, line 14, leave out ("Transport for London shall not") and insert

("Neither Transport for London nor the Authority shall")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 217 to 222 and 567.

Mr. Hill: When the Bill left this House, clause 141 and parts of clause 140 placed restrictions on Transport for London's ability to dispose of operational railway and tramway land. The clause is designed to prevent the permanent sale of key operational assets, primarily underground and docklands light railway lines and stations. Transport for London is required to obtain the Secretary of State's consent to such disposals. However, the Bill as drafted required Transport for London to obtain the Secretary of State's consent to any disposal of operational railway or tramway land. The Government acknowledge that this formulation was unduly restrictive. It might have meant that Transport for London had to seek consent to all land disposals, instead of just those involving underground and DLR lines and stations.

The amendments, therefore, gave effect to a previous ministerial undertaking that the restrictions on disposal of land would be refined to give Transport for London some operational flexibility over its property portfolio.

The amendments change the definition of operational land, so that the Secretary of State's consent to disposal will not be required when the land in question is comparable to land in general, rather than land used for railway purposes. Amendment No. 220 provides that where underground or DLR lines or stations cease to be used for railway purposes, disposal will not be permitted without the Secretary of State's consent for a period of five years thereafter, or such other period as the Secretary of State may determine by order.

We think that the amendments strike the right balance between the need for Transport for London to have some operational flexibility and the protection of key operational assets.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 217 to 222 agreed to.

Clause 142

CONTROL OF SUBSIDIARIES

Lords amendment: No. 223, in page 76, line 41, leave out ("Secretary of State,") and insert ("Mayor,")

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 25.

Division No. 296] **[6 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covtry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline

Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. David Clelland.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cotter, Brian
Fearn, Ronnie
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Hancock, Mike
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Webb, Steve
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and Mr. Edward Davey.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 224 to 228 agreed to.

Clause 143

POWERS OF DISPOSAL

Lords amendment: No. 229, in page 77, line 3, leave out ("In")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 230, 231, 297 to 333, 335, 569 and 705 to 707.

Mr. Hill: Again, I—

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you investigate the fact that, apparently, the Division Bells are not ringing in Norman Shaw North?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. That point has already been made and steps are being taken to investigate the matter.

Mr. Hill: This group of amendments makes a number of largely technical or clarifying changes to the provisions relating to the London Underground public-private partnership. The structure and overall effect of the PPP provisions remain the same as they were when this House last considered the Bill.

The first batch of amendments relates to PPP agreements and the arrangements for designating key assets. Amendments Nos. 287, 299, 300 and 335 extend to a subsidiary of London Regional Transport and Transport for London the powers already held by those parent bodies to enter into PPP agreements and to designate key system assets for the special protection provided by the Bill.

Amendment No. 298 provides for the PPP agreements to be entered into while infrastructure companies are still subsidiaries of London Underground Ltd. Amendments Nos. 301 to 304 give Transport for London greater flexibility over the format, but not the content, of the information about key assets that it is required to make publicly available.

Amendments Nos. 305 to 310 and amendment No. 329 provide for TfL to make transfer schemes for the distribution of property among its subsidiaries and PPP companies, so as to enable the mayor to retrieve all protected assets at the end of PPP contracts.

The second and largest batch of amendments—Nos. 318 to 328, 330 to 333, and 560—adjust and expand the existing provisions regarding the PPP arbiter, a post created by the Bill to determine the price to be paid by London Underground for the work undertaken by a PPP company, if a dispute were to arise at a periodic review of the contract. The provisions allow the same person to hold the offices of Rail Regulator and arbiter, although I stress that no decision has been taken on an appointment. The provisions clarify the circumstances in which the arbiter can issue directions and guidance; refine the drafting of some of his statutory duties; provide legal protections and sanctions relating to his information-gathering powers; and ensure that terms used in the chapter are adequately defined.

The third batch of amendments makes technical or editorial changes. Amendments Nos. 229 to 231 clarify London Transport's existing powers of disposal. Amendments Nos. 311 to 317 adjust the existing land provisions to avoid uncertainty in the treatment of PPP leases. Amendments Nos. 705 to 707 delete a couple of superfluous provisions in schedule 11.

6.15 pm

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary for his explanation of this group of amendments. We have a special interest in amendment No. 332. Our interest is heightened because I am aware that the hon. Gentleman, who is relatively new to his post, has, like Opposition Members, had some difficulty in fathoming the extraordinary number of amendments that we have had to consider.

The job of the Opposition has been made especially difficult by the absence—by and large—of explanatory notes for the amendments. Last Wednesday, the day before we first considered Lords amendments to the Bill, the Under-Secretary made some notes available. As there are 818 Government amendments, it has, however, been extremely difficult to cope at this late stage with the explanatory notes, which do not in any case include an explanation of many of the amendments. I hope that my preamble is giving the Minister for Housing and Planning time to provide his assistant with the necessary information to cope with my comments. My questions are genuine. Perhaps the Under-Secretary will be able to satisfy us—perhaps not. We look forward to hearing what he has to say.

Amendment No. 332 follows on from the previous amendment—they are interrelated and deal with the power of the PPP arbiter to requisition any information that he desires, within legal bounds. However, amendment No. 332 seems to restrict the arbiter from making some of the information public. Its stated purpose is to give statutory protection to third parties against the disclosure of information collected by the arbiter. How do the Government reconcile that protection with the principle of open government and freedom of information? What has happened to the principle of freedom of information in the Bill?

We now know that some serious questions have to be answered regarding safety in our public transport system. For that reason, some people have been especially concerned about whether it is appropriate to continue to hold negotiations between Railtrack, the Secretary of State and five of the London tube lines. Questions have been put about freedom of information and the background to those negotiations, but the Secretary of State has strenuously refused to supply an answer. If the amendment were accepted, would it mean that, if Railtrack did not want to disclose information, it would—or could—have the power to stop that disclosure?

People are rightly concerned that the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has been content to hold secret negotiations with Railtrack, despite concerns about safety, and that he continues to refuse to allow information to enter the public domain in any shape or form. We have no information about his negotiations: we know nothing about the tender, or about the demands he is making with regard to safety. The answer to those and many other questions is that we simply do not know.

Perhaps when he has finished consulting his colleague the Minister for Housing and Planning, the Under-Secretary will be able to answer our questions. If he cannot, I am sure that his right hon. Friend will take time off from his campaign duties to advise the House. In the current circumstances of concern about public transport, secrecy is unfair. Why should the travelling public not know what is happening to the currently publicly owned tube? Why, in the age of open government, can information pertaining to the relationship between the PPP and, for example, the Civil Aviation Authority, be obliged to be made public, whereas

information pertaining to discussions between Ministers and Railtrack on the PPP remain secret? What guarantees are being made in respect of safety?

We know that large numbers of trains on the underground—a system held in public ownership—have gone through red lights. We know that a train protection system is in use on the underground. As Ministers will know, concerns have been raised by those working on underground trains about the adequacy of that train protection system. Will the PPP arbiter be obliged to keep background details about such safety issues, and can that information be made public? Will the arbiter have access to all the papers currently in the possession of the Secretary of State as he takes advice on those issues? Will he have access, as the House does not, to the unpublished Deloitte and Touche report on the PPP, which we believe says that the PPP cannot work and will not work commercially without a dramatic increase in fares and a diminution of service provision to the public? What access will the Assembly have to information held by the arbiter? If the people of London cannot have it, will the Assembly be allowed to see it?

Subsection (4) of amendment No. 332 would appear to give the Secretary of State the order-making power to modify the preceding subsections, as and when he wants, and so to undermine subsections (2) and (3). What is the reason for that provision, and in what circumstances would it be used by the Secretary of State?

The amendments would appear to be ill-considered. Perhaps the Minister will be able to provide a genuinely satisfactory explanation and tell us that the PPP arbiter will be able to gain the necessary information and that all the information will be made public. Perpetuating a climate of secrecy is the wrong way to proceed in the current circumstances. As for the on-going negotiations with Railtrack, does amendment No. 332 mean that Railtrack could be obliged to disclose information, or that the company could say, as the amendment suggests it could, that the information was not

"for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out by"

the Secretary of State or others

"of any or his or, as the case may be, its functions",

and so could remain secret?

Mr. Brake: The House heard earlier the rather weak and confused grounds on which the mayor is to be denied the opportunity to issue bonds. Now we have heard the Minister's explanation of the current group of amendments, but many doubts about the PPP remain.

First and foremost of those concerns is the role of Railtrack in the public-private partnership, to which amendment No. 332 is highly relevant. We need to know what negotiations with Railtrack are taking place; why the subsurface lines have not been put out to tender; and whether there is any likelihood that that might in future be subject to legal challenge on the grounds that it is anti-competitive.

What is the timetable for signing the PPP contracts? Earlier, I quoted a response to a parliamentary question in which I was told that the contracts would be signed when they were ready; that is not a satisfactory response. If they are to be signed in 18 months or two years, what impact will that have on the availability of funds for investing in the tube during the period before the PPP kicks in?

I hope that the Minister will be able to answer my questions in detail. We have faced continuous stalling, month after month and year after year. Unless the Minister is able to provide a satisfactory response, many hon. Members will go away believing that the PPP is off course and bound to fail.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I rise to support my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward). We are clearly entering new territory with the concept of the public-private partnership. My view is that a service or industry is either in the public sector or privatised, and that to try to mix the two does not augur well unless the parties involved have information and unless that information is open to the public to judge for themselves.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) asked why the subsurface lines were not being put out to tender. Incidentally, I should like to put on record the fact that "subsurface" is a contradiction in terms, but, setting that aside, there must be some explanation. In addition, if one is to try to make the concept of public-private partnership work, the length of the contracts to be awarded is crucial, as are the back-up compensation clauses for the private organisation that has its tender accepted.

A myriad of issues must be addressed—if not before the Bill is passed, then when the PPP concept begins to take shape. The Government have prided themselves on open government and joined-up government; sadly, in respect of putting flesh on the bones of PPP, they have achieved neither.

Mr. Edward Davey: I rise to support the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) in respect of his concerns about amendment No. 332 and the restrictions on disclosure of information.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we debated the matter in Committee, where we expressed our concern about the financial modelling of the PPP scheme. Ministers told us that we had nothing to worry about and that huge fare increases were not contained in the modelling. The consultants' report which the Government used to dream up the scheme contained no assumption of huge tube fare rises. However, only recently, London Transport has announced that fares on the London underground are to rise by 7 per cent.—that is incredibly worrying as it goes against the spirit of many of the speeches made by Ministers in the Committee.

Mr. Woodward: I am struck by the way in which, whereas Ministers have resorted throughout our two-day debate to saying that all the Lords amendments are technical, if we examine one amendment and pull it apart, we find that it is anything but technical and has implications that extend well beyond the scope of the Bill.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

Returning to the matter of fares, the PPP scheme and future versions of the PPP scheme as considered by the PPP arbiter, are we going to find in future years that large fare increases have been negotiated yet again? Behind the PPP and the secret negotiations, is there a hidden agenda of fare rises stretching into the future? If London

[Mr. Davey]

Transport is prepared to announce publicly a 7 per cent. rise before the GLA elections, what is being decided behind closed doors, out of public view?

I am incredibly worried by the amendments, which make problems that were highlighted in Committee even worse. Most disturbing is the fact that, during the run-up to the GLA elections, when the different parties put before the people of London their different models and agendas for London transport, we shall not know what financial modelling assumptions lie behind the PPP scheme and the negotiations that will be going on at that time.

6.30 pm

Perhaps the Greater London Authority, as it takes power and starts its work, will not be informed until the PPP has been signed. Until it has been signed, the mayor will not be privy to the assumptions behind it. The absurd situation could therefore arise in which the mayor and the Assembly members had fought an election without knowing the fare increases that had been debated in the negotiations on the PPP. Such secrecy makes a mockery of open government and of the Government's claim that they are modernising their methods of government.

I hope that the Government will withdraw amendment No. 332 because the debate exposes their vulnerability to attack during the election campaign. We shall be able to claim that they try to prevent debate and refuse to provide information on their plans. Unless the Government are prepared to withdraw such gagging measures, I warn the Minister that we shall have the benefit of the Government's actions as proof to back up our argument that they have a secret agenda of fare rises.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I want to speak briefly to the amendments, and pick up one or two of the anxieties that have been expressed by Conservative Front Benchers and my hon. Friends.

The PPP and its genesis could be seen to symbolise the Bill and the large number of amendments that have been tabled at almost every stage of its passage. In its Commons and Lords stages, the Government have attempted to create on the hoof an elaborate architecture for the fabrication of the funding for investment in London Transport. It beggars belief that, at this stage, Ministers are unable to come to the House and provide detailed figures and the assurances that we need about how the PPP will work in practice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) said that we are still told by Ministers that we will not know when the PPP is ready: that it will be ready when it is ready and signed when it is signed. That is unsatisfactory both for mayoral candidates and for the House. We are being asked to approve legislation tonight that will establish a procedure whose implications we cannot foresee or understand. Ministers seem unable or unwilling to share with us the Bill's consequences.

We have no information about the PPP's long-term cost to the public purse. Yet that is fundamental to assessing whether the PPP constitutes the right way to proceed. How can we have a serious mayoral debate about investment in London transport when amendment No. 332 and many other provisions in the Bill deny us essential information about the PPP? I hope that the Government will withdraw the amendment and rethink a structure that would leave Londoners with an unsatisfactory arrangement and cost the taxpayer far more than necessary.

Mr. Hill: The amendment has provoked a wide range of grievances and charges. I shall attempt to deal with them more or less in chronological order.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) began by complaining about lack of information on amendments. I acknowledge that there is much to be tackled. However, as the hon. Gentleman should concede, we have been scrupulous in ensuring that the Opposition in another place were sent explanatory notes on all major amendments during the Bill's progress through the House so that they were able to scrutinise them fully. In response to a specific request in the form of a parliamentary question on Monday last week by the hon. Gentleman, we were able to place in the Library on Wednesday explanatory notes on all new clauses and schedules that were added in another place. The explanatory note on amendment No. 332, which has proved so contentious, was available from the Library almost a week ago—in good time for deliberations on it today.

Various points have been made about the proposed London Underground public-private partnership. Let me deal with one of them—safety. I cannot emphasise too strongly that safety is paramount when considering the PPP. We shall take account of any lessons of the Southall and Ladbroke Grove accidents that have implications for the underground. The PPP deal is structured so that public sector London Underground will continue to have responsibility for the statutory railway safety case for the whole underground. The PPP infrastructure companies will take over existing safety cases that are agreed with Her Majesty's railway inspectorate. They form part of London Underground's overall safety case and the PPP companies will be obliged to maintain them. I stress that public sector London Underground Ltd. will have overall responsibility for safety. It will be the guiding mind on safety on the London Underground under the PPP.

There has been some scaremongering about fares from the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats. On a point of information, the report that the hon. Gentleman had in mind was not by Deloitte and Touche, as the hon. Gentleman claimed, but by Chantrey Vellacott. That report suggested that the PPP would lead to a 30 per cent. increase in fares. The analysis in the note that Chantrey Vellacott published is flawed.

Mr. Woodward: Of course, I was right: there are two reports. The Chantrey Vellacott report is available to everyone; we have all read it. It claims that tube fares will increase by 30 per cent. under the PPP—the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) claims that the increase will be 40 per cent. The other report analyses the various options for the future of London Underground. It has been on the Secretary of State's desk, but he refuses to make it public because it claims that the PPP proposals are barmy and that the Government should not proceed with them.

Mr. Hill: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that all the reports that claim that there will be vast increases in London Underground fares under the PPP are wrong. I shall explain the reasons briefly.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Hill: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself for a second, I shall say a little more about the Chantrey Vellacott report, which has been mentioned in the debate.

Mr. Woodward: We did not ask the Minister to say more about it.

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman may not have done so, but one of his sidekicks on the Liberal Democrat Benches asked about it. Therefore, I shall deal with that point first. We shall deal with other reports in due course. There is a fundamental position on fares on London Underground under the PPP, about which I shall speak shortly.

I have not forgotten the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), but I want to comment on the Chantrey Vellacott report first. We do not accept that fares will increase on the scale that Chantrey Vellacott suggested. Its working assumptions were flawed. It is an error to assume that the bulk of initial investment will be financed through borrowing. Neither does Chantrey Vellacott take account of the efficiency savings that will result from London Underground having a stable long-term investment programme. The savings have been variously projected at between 15 and 20 per cent., so they will be substantial.

We have repeatedly stated that we shall award the contracts only if they represent best value. We would not be embarking on a PPP competition if we did not believe that there was a very good chance of achieving best value for the taxpayer.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his patience; I now give way.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful to the Minister for his patience, and I appreciate the opportunity to intervene now. Will he assure the House that, when the PPP finally becomes operational, annual fare rises on the London underground will be significantly lower than the inflation-busting increases that Londoners have had to endure since May 1997?

Mr. Hill: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raises that point, because I want to come to precisely that issue. The economic modelling on which the PPP proposals have been based has operated on the assumption that fares would increase by no more than the retail prices index plus 1 per cent. in the next two years, and in line with inflation after that. Therefore, I assure him and the wider public, whom he is attempting to terrify, that there is absolutely no question of significant fare increases under the PPP. It will be funded by the efficiency savings achieved by a long-term stable rolling programme of investment.

Mr. Edward Davey: I am grateful that the Minister has tried to reassure the House—I am not sure that he has succeeded—that, once the PPP is in operation, fare increases will not be of the size that we have just experienced. Is that because there will be many more huge fare increases before the PPP is signed? Is that why there has been such a delay in signing the PPP? Just like the Tories did before rail privatisation, the Government might want to sneak in a few high fare increases.

Mr. Hill: Rather than sitting there preparing his intervention, the hon. Gentleman should have listened more carefully I made it absolutely clear that, in the first two years leading up to the PPP, the assumption in the economic modelling is that fares will not increase by more than the retail prices index plus 1 per cent. There is no question of huge increases leading up to that point. From spring next year and up to the conclusion of the PPP, the mayor will have a stake in the arrangements for the PPP, including those for the fare levels. I am certain that the new mayor of London will not be in the business of encouraging substantial fare increases.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) referred to the Deloitte and Touche report and made several accusations. I confirm that we are not aware of any Deloitte and Touche report on the PPP. The hon. Gentleman may be referring to the study that my Department commissioned from PricewaterhouseCoopers, which was concluded last year. We published a summary of it, but we cannot publish it in its entirety because of commercially confidentiality. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand that. It certainly did not say that fare increases would result from the PPP.

On the achievability of the PPP, I reiterate what I said in an earlier debate: London Transport announced on 7 October that five consortiums have pre-qualified in the competition for deep tubes and will be invited to tender for the deep tube infrastructure contracts. The invitation to tender was issued on 19 October and bids are due back next March. The House will be pleased to hear that there was a strong field of applications, and that reflects the keen interest for the PPP in the marketplace. It is on stream and will be achieved.

6.45 pm

Mr. Redwood: Before the Minister leaves the subject, will he tell the House how much preparations for the PPP have so far cost? What is his estimate of the total cost, including all the expenses of legal and financial advice from inside and outside his Department? Will that be paid for out of the fare box or out of taxation?

Mr. Hill: The right hon. Gentleman has a bit of a cheek in raising that issue. Few of us will forget that the cost of consultancies and preparations for the deeply flawed privatisation of the railways, which broke up our railway system into a hundred pieces, was about £650 million. The last parliamentary answer provided by the Government in response to a question about the cost of the preparations for the PPP stated that they had cost not more than £20 million to date. There is a massive difference between the extortionate costs that the right hon. Gentleman's Government imposed on the taxpayer and the extremely reasonable and cautious attitude adopted by this Government.

Reference was made to negotiations with Railtrack and to the provision of information. I emphasise that amendment No. 332 is not relevant to the negotiations of PPP agreements, including those with Railtrack. It relates

[Mr. Hill]

to periodic reviews of contracts after they have been entered into. Information on the negotiation of PPPs will be made available in the normal way to the National Audit Office. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has also made it clear that details of the public sector comparator, another issued raised by Opposition Members, will be published.

Mr. Woodward: If the PPP arbiter wishes to review the terms and conditions of a contract with Railtrack once the mayor is in post, will it be possible to disclose that information and make it public?

Mr. Hill: Yes. New clause 332 restricts the disclosure only of information that is irrelevant to the statutory duties of the arbiter and other statutory bodies listed. That is a reasonable protection to third parties, such as suppliers to PPP companies.

Mr. Brake: Will the Minister clarify at what point he expects the public sector comparator test for the PPP to be complete, what cost he expects to have been incurred at that point and who will pick up the bill should the public sector comparator test reveal that the PPP is not financially viable?

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman raises two issues. I am not able—the hon. Gentleman could not reasonably expect me to be able—to speculate about the final costs of the consultancy and preparatory work for the PPP. No one could do that. I think that I have demonstrated clearly, however, that the Government have adopted an extremely prudent and cautious approach to such costs.

The Government have repeatedly made it clear that we will publish the public sector comparator before the conclusion of the PPP. When that occurs—we presume that it will be in 2001—the hon. Gentleman, other Members and the public will be able to judge on the basis of that test. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made it clear that, if the public sector comparator were negative about the PPP, there would be no question of our going forward with it.

Mr. Woodward *rose—*

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose—*

Mr. Hill: I see several Members wishing to challenge me on that point, but I saw the hon. Member for Witney first. I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. We may wish to divide the House on the amendment, so it must be made crystal clear. Is the Minister saying that amendment No. 332 will not stop the PPP arbiter from obtaining all the background information on the negotiations with Railtrack, the consultation documents and the advice to the Secretary of State, and that that information can be published—yes or no?

Mr. Hill: I shall revert to that. I had intended to go on to the safety issue. Let me deal with that before I deal with the question about the role of the arbiter. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on.] It is a matter of good order in responding to the points raised in the debate, as I am sure hon. Members understand.

Let me deal with the issue of whether amendment No. 332 covers disclosure affecting functions relating to the Health and Safety Executive and safety provisions. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman raised the issue. Subsection (2) makes it clear that the provisions of the new clause do not apply

"to any disclosure of information which is made"—

I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to subsection (f)—

"for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out by the Health and Safety Commission or the Health and Safety Executive of any of its functions under any enactment or of facilitating the carrying out by any enforcing authority, within the meaning of Part I of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, of any function under a relevant statutory provision within the meaning of that Act".

That makes it crystal clear that no matter relating to health and safety on the underground will be subject to any prevention of disclosure under the terms of the Bill.

On the broader issue of freedom of information, I remind the hon. Gentleman that amendment No. 332 provides statutory protection to third parties against disclosure of information collected by the arbiter, except where it is necessary to carry out the specific statutory functions referred to in the clause. It is enforceable by means of a civil injunction.

The hon. Gentleman asked how that was compatible with freedom of information principles. I find that an extraordinary question.

Mr. Redwood: Why?

Mr. Hill: For the simple reason that the provisions are again based on the Railways Act 1993, but again, for reasons of proportionality, provide a civil rather than a criminal sanction. In other words, the legislation introduced by the Conservative Government imposed a criminal sanction for the disclosure of information. The legislation that the present Government are introducing imposes a civil rather than a criminal sanction. The House will recognise where the balance of openness and transparency lies between a criminal sanction for those seeking to disclose information and a civil sanction in that situation.

Mr. Corbyn: I wanted to give my hon. Friend a little time to catch up with the other issues that have been raised. Many people are deeply concerned about the PPP and the possibility that it will fail and that Londoners will be saddled with an expensive bill and large fare rises to pay for it. Will the matter come back before the House before the PPP is signed, or will the mayor to be appointed next year have to implement the deal that has been done? Will the scrutiny of the PPP be for the mayor and the Assembly, or for the House before such a deal is signed?

Mr. Hill: I can reassure my hon. Friend. Of course there will be a report back to the House. It is inconceivable that, the Secretary of State and the House having sanctioned the PPP, the matter should not be brought back in due course to the House of Commons.

Mr. Woodward: As we all know, the Minister is filibustering while he desperately tries to obtain

the answers. Any accusations of filibustering made by the Government will sit uncomfortably in the House. I hope that the Minister has now got the answers. Will he wind up the debate by telling the House whether, when the mayor is in place, if the PPP arbiter wishes, he will be given all the advice behind the commercial dealings currently going on with the Secretary of State and Railtrack? Will that information be made available to the PPP arbiter and will it be made public—yes or no?

Mr. Hill: Not all of it. Despite the hilarity on the Opposition Benches, it is an entirely reasonable proposition that there will be elements of commercial confidentiality, which I clearly recollect the previous Government were only too eager to plead on many occasions. It is not an intrinsically unreasonable principle.

I have already made it clear that amendment No. 332 is not related to the negotiation of contracts and that information on all PPPs will be available to the National Audit Office, which will no doubt wish to scrutinise them.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Minister told the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) that there would be a report back to the House before the PPP was signed. Are the Government minded to allow the House to vote on that report, and will it contain details of the negotiations behind the PPP—details that we have not yet seen?

Mr. Hill: That question is a little premature. It will be a matter for the usual channels, but undoubtedly the Secretary of State will wish to report back to the House. With that, I urge the House to support amendment No. 332 and other amendments in this group.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 230 to 238 agreed to.

Clause 148

ADDITION OR VARIATION OF A NETWORK SERVICE

Lords amendment: No. 239, in page 79, line 1, leave out ("local") and insert ("London")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 240 to 267, 273 and 274.

Mr. Hill: This group of amendments provides further safeguards for the interests of holders of, and applicants for, London service permits. They respond to concerns raised in this House at Committee stage.

The amendments also make improvements to consultation procedures for both London bus network services and London permit services.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 240 to 274 agreed to.

Clause 161

POWER OF AUTHORITY TO GIVE GUIDANCE TO THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR

Lords amendment: No. 275, in page 85, line 3, after ("give") insert ("instructions or")

7 pm

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 276 to 296, 554, 568, 573, 718 and 802.

Mr. Hill: The amendments, which concern railways and trams, deal with services on the national rail network and aspects of Transport for London rail services. They will achieve a number of things, such as giving effect to the undertaking given on Report by my predecessor to introduce measures that will more fully define the relationship between the mayor and the Strategic Rail Authority. That undertaking was generally welcomed by Conservative Members and, indeed, in the other place. The Bill will thus fully provide for the mayor to have a strong voice in rail, while ensuring that that will not detract from the Strategic Rail Authority's overall responsibility for services on the national network.

We have taken a balanced approach which is designed to encourage a constructive relationship. For example, Transport for London and the franchising director will be under a duty to co-operate in the provision of services, and the franchising director will be required to consult the mayor about his plans for London rail fares and services.

The amendments also set out the procedures to be followed for the consideration of proposals to discontinue rail services operated by Transport for London, primarily on the underground. They transfer to the mayor the current responsibility of the Secretary of State to take decisions on proposed discontinuance of services, but otherwise there is no significant alteration. They also provide that London Transport and Transport for London will not be constrained—for example, by the terms of London Transport's exemption from the national licensing and access regulatory regime—from entering into appropriate arrangements to integrate the tube and national rail networks.

The amendments place restrictions on the mayor's ability to franchise or contract out certain train and station-operating functions. The purpose is to ensure that underground trains and stations continue to be operated by a publicly owned, publicly accountable London Underground in line with the commitment given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 15 June. Finally, they transfer to the mayor certain responsibilities of the Secretary of State in respect of the docklands light railway and Croydon tramlink, and provide for the continuation of the arrangements for penalty fares on Croydon tramlink.

Mr. Brake: I support the amendments. It was clear at the beginning of the process that there was a major flaw in the Government's proposals: the mayor would have very little say over rail services in London and his ability to give guidance to the franchising director would hardly

[Mr. Brake]

be likely to achieve integration of rail, tube and bus services in London. I therefore welcome this slight amendment, which will ensure that the mayor is also able to give instructions.

I hope that there will be co-operation between the mayor and the franchising director and that it will not be necessary to give instructions, but it is important that such a power exists. It will mean that the mayor should be able to have a greater say over the quality of train services in London. Those of us who commute regularly know that every passenger is affected every day by overcrowding, cancellations and dirty trains. I support the change and hope that, as a result of it, the mayor's ability to give instructions to the franchising director will help to achieve the leap to better-quality rail services in London.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I listened to what the Minister said about the effects of the amendments. Those to clause 161 and amendment No. 288 refer to instructions, guidance and consultation in respect of the mayor, the authority and the franchising director, which is all very well. A few minutes ago, the Minister said that they refer in particular to instances in which there might be proposals for discontinuing services. Epping Forest is in Essex, not London. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that thousands of my constituents depend on London underground services? The Central line runs out to Chigwell, Loughton, Theydon Bois and even to Epping, but my constituents—

Mr. Raynsford: To Ongar.

Mrs. Laing: From a sedentary position, the Minister says that the Central line runs to Ongar. It no longer does so.

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Gentleman has not been a Minister for long.

Mrs. Laing: I know; he has forgotten about Ongar.

I was given assurances by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson)—who might become mayor of London herself—when she was a Minister that the track between Epping and Ongar would be protected as railway track. [HON. MEMBERS: "Early pledge."] It was an early pledge, indeed, and I am pleased to put that on the record.

At present, the service runs all the way to Epping, but my constituents in Epping Forest, who are not residents of London, do not have a vote for either the mayor or the authority. Therefore, one could hardly expect either the mayor or members of the Assembly to put the interests of my constituents high on their list of priorities when they consult, or issue instructions or guidance to, the franchising director or deal with any other issue concerning the future of London underground.

London underground is extremely important to my constituents. I consider it to be one of my first duties as Member of Parliament for Epping Forest to protect the future of London underground services to my constituency. Will the Minister guarantee that, in conjunction with all those other people who will be consulted about the interests of the people they represent in Greater London, I will be consulted and will continue to have the right to speak in the Chamber on behalf of my constituents, who depend utterly on London underground? They will have no voice in the Authority or with the mayor—only with their Member of Parliament. The House must not lose its right to discuss those matters.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate. I congratulate the Under-Secretary of State on beginning to fly solo, although he seems to hit the odd bit of turbulence when he is forced away from his script. I have noticed that his instructor's hands occasionally twitch back towards the controls, but let us hope the hon. Gentleman gains confidence as time goes on.

Listening to the Minister's introductory comments, one might have thought that the amendments were fairly minor and would have relatively little effect. The reality, of course, is very different, which is a common theme throughout the Bill. According to my analysis, amendments Nos. 288, 289, 290, 291, 294, 295, 296 and 554 all incorporate new clauses to the Bill. That is worth thinking about, at least for a moment, in relation to the helter-skelter way in which we are considering the amendments.

Mr. Redwood: We are not allowed a minute.

Mr. Waterson: As my right hon. Friend says, we are not even allowed a minute. It is worth pointing out that substantial changes are being made by a group of amendments which we have again to debate at great speed.

Clause 161(8) refers to the functions of the authority that are

"exercisable by the Mayor acting on behalf of the Authority."

There is a lot of confusion in the provisions about the powers of the mayor, and where they finish and those of the Secretary of State or, in due course, the Strategic Rail Authority—start.

Some of the amendments are to include the "instructions", as well as guidance, which are to be given by the mayor to the franchising director. The amendments depend heavily on good will existing between the mayor and the Secretary of State. One could envisage those two being from different political parties, but that would be as nothing compared with the possibility of their being from the same party if the mayor has been elected in spite of his right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government—*[Interruption.]* The Minister for Local Government and the Regions is continuing her running commentary on all Opposition speeches. How paltry our debates would be without her contributions. Clearly, problems will arise because, if the new mayor has had difficulties in being approved as a candidate for the Labour party, or in being elected to the post of mayor, he or she may not be entirely well disposed towards the Secretary of State—whoever that might be.

The amendments seem to face in two directions. They appear—as the Minister would like them to—to beef up the mayor's powers. The Minister echoed the words of Lord Whitty in the other place when he said that the mayor would be a "voice for London". In reality, however, the amendments might bring the mayor into conflict with the Secretary of State. Although the mayor

is supposed to stand up for Londoners—we have heard that theme more than once in this and previous debates—he or she must also deal with the Secretary of State and, in due course, the Strategic Rail Authority. The current Secretary of State has a penchant for rail summits and the like, and seeks to interfere more and more at all levels in the operation of the railways, both within and outside London.

Lord Whitty talked about defining

"the relationship between the mayor and the franchising director"—

and, in due course, between the mayor and the proposed Strategic Rail Authority. He said that the Government were

"committed to giving the mayor a strong voice in rail, but that the mayor's powers should not detract from the wider strategic responsibilities of the franchising director and the strategic rail authority."

It is difficult to see, where there is also a duty to consult the mayor over proposed changes to service levels and fares, what will happen if the mayor takes a radically different view from that of those other bodies. As Lord Whitty pointed out,

"the franchising director will have to implement the mayor's instructions and guidance unless to do so will 'prevent or seriously hinder him' complying with the Secretary of State's guidance."

He then said, no doubt with a straight face:

"The amendment preserves that principle but gives the mayor more flexibility".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 July 1999; Vol. 603, c. 544-55.]

It seems to be left entirely to the franchising director to decide whether what the mayor wants would have an adverse impact on the remainder of the network. That was left in the air in an exchange between Lord Whitty and Baroness Hamwee. It would be interesting to hear whether the Government's thoughts on that point have changed in the interim.

7.15 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) made some excellent points on behalf of her constituents and expressed concern about the closure of services. One of the amendments proposes that the mayor, rather than the Secretary of State, should make decisions on closures, although there will still be a right of appeal to the Secretary of State. Although we hear a lot of rhetoric about giving the mayor a voice on subjects such as railways, ultimately, the Secretary of State will retain a lot of power to ensure that the mayor cannot kick over the traces and cause too many difficulties. Those comments apply also to the provisions for penalty fares.

As with other groups of amendments, we should have liked much more time to consider these matters in more detail. A look behind the Minister's introductory remarks, reveals that some of these amendments incorporate fairly complex new clauses into the Bill. Unless the Minister's explanation is superlatively good, I intend to press amendment No. 294 to a vote.

Mr. Hill: May I begin by thanking the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) for his support on this matter? The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) made an interesting and useful intervention, which permits me to offer her some reassurances about the rights of her constituents who live outside the area covered by the GLA. Schedule 9 gives Transport for London powers similar to those currently enjoyed by London Transport, under which the latter runs services to destinations outside London. There is no reason why Transport for London should do differently. Moreover, it will be the mayor's duty, under clause 123, to promote services to, from and within London. Similarly, those aggrieved about closures outside London will be able to appeal to the Secretary of State, as at present.

On the representation of people outside London, Transport for London will inform local authorities outside London affected by the proposals of its plans for fares and services. The Assembly will also be required to have regard to the interests of rail users outside London when it makes appointments to the London Transport Users Committee. The mayor will also consult widely on his or her transport strategy.

Mrs. Laing: I sincerely thank the Minister for those straight answers to my questions. Could my constituents have a representative role by being appointed to the consultative committee?

Mr. Hill: My understanding is that they could, bearing in mind that the responsibilities of the LTUC, as it will be called, extend well outside the London area—from Bicester in the north to Gatwick in the south. Thus there will be opportunities for representation on that committee. The LTUC has statutory duties with regard to the representation of rail and other transport users outside as well as within London. It will have a close relationship with the mayor and the Assembly, and it will expect those wider responsibilities to be taken on board by the GLA. The hon. Lady can therefore rest reasonably assured about the future of railway services in her locality.

The hon. Lady also asked whether she would continue to have the right to speak about those matters in this Chamber. Of course she will. However, some 7 million Londoners currently have no right to govern their affairs. Under the GLA, they will have precisely that right, as they elect the mayor and the Assembly.

On the issues raised by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), I would expect tensions occasionally to arise between the mayor and the Secretary of State. That is the nature of politics, and it would be improper if it were otherwise. What one seeks to do in legislation of this nature is to create a framework for conflict resolution. That, I think, is a fruitful process.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne raised issues relating to the mayor's powers in regard to the franchising director. It is as well to remember that, in all that he or she does, the mayor will be operating with the mandate of many millions of Londoners. That is a powerful basis on which to relate to the railway authorities.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the Bill gives the mayor powers to issue instructions and guidance—terminology taken from the Railways Act 1993, introduced by his own Government. However, we also make it perfectly clear that the franchising director, the Secretary of State and the relevant railway bodies will need to have their primary responsibility, the national rail network, firmly before their eyes. If the issues and guidance offered by the mayor seemed to impinge on that, the national interest would—probably rightly—need to prevail.

[Mr. Hill]

What we envisage, however, is a positive, constructive and fruitful relationship between the mayor and the railway authorities. We are delighted to commend to the House amendments that meet a widespread demand for the mayor to be given more precise and more effective powers as a strong voice on behalf of railway users, in both London and the surrounding areas.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 276 to 293 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 294, after clause 166, to insert the following new clause—*Restrictions on contracting out certain services*—

" .—(1) For the purposes of this section, the services which are "reserved services" are those whose provision by a person would involve that person in performing or securing the performance, for the purposes of any TfL passenger rail service, of—

(a) any station–operating function; or

(b) any train–operating function.

(2) Transport for London shall not, without the consent of the Secretary of State, enter into or carry out any agreement under which an outside contractor is to provide or secure the provision of a reserved service for Transport for London or a subsidiary of Transport for London.

(3) Where a company which is a subsidiary of Transport for London provides or is to provide, or secures or is to secure the provision of, a reserved service for Transport for London or a subsidiary of Transport for London, Transport for London shall not, without the consent of the Secretary of State, enter into any transaction or series of transactions the result of which would be that the company—

(a) would cease to be a subsidiary of Transport for London; but

(b) would nevertheless provide or continue to provide, or secure or continue to secure the provision of, the reserved service.

(4) Nothing in this section applies in relation to a contract of employment between an individual and Transport for London or a subsidiary of Transport for London.

(5) The Secretary of State may by order provide exceptions from subsection (2) or (3) above.

(6) Any consent of the Secretary of State under this section must be in writing and—

(a) may be given in relation to any particular transaction or description of transactions; and

(b) may be given subject to conditions.

(7) For the purposes of this section—

"station–operating function" means any of the following functions—

(a) the sale or collection of tickets at stations;

(b) the inspection of tickets, or the imposing of penalty fares, at or in the vicinity of a station, but otherwise than on a train;

(c) the making of oral public announcements at stations;

(d) the provision of information orally to members of the public at stations, otherwise than by means of public announcements;

(e) any duties of staff employed on platforms at stations;

(f) any duties of staff employed at a place from which the operation of the whole or part of a station is controlled (whether or not the operation of trains is also controlled from that place);

(g) any other function involved in the management or operation of a station;

"train–operating function" means any of the following functions—

(a) the driving of passenger trains otherwise than within a depot;

(b) any duties of guards on passenger trains;

(c) the sale, collection or inspection of tickets, or the imposing of penalty fares, on passenger trains;

(d) the operation of signals for controlling the movement of passenger trains otherwise than within a depot;

(e) the exercise of control over the movement of passenger trains otherwise than within a depot;

(f) any other function involved in the operation of passenger trains otherwise than within a depot.

(8) In this section—

"contract of employment" means any contract of service or apprenticeship;

"outside contractor" means a person other than Transport for London or a subsidiary of Transport for London;

"passenger train" means a train which is being, has just been, or is about to be, used for the provision of a TfL passenger rail service;

"premises" includes any land, building or structure;

"railway" has the meaning given in section 67(1) of the Transport and Works Act 1992;

"reserved service" shall be construed in accordance with subsection (1) above;

"station" means any land or other property which consists of premises used as, or for the purposes of, or otherwise in connection with, a railway passenger station or railway passenger terminal (including any approaches, forecourt, cycle store or car park), whether or not the land or other property is, or the premises are, also used for other purposes;

"TfL passenger rail service" means any public service for the carriage of passengers by railway which is under the control of Transport for London or a subsidiary of Transport for London;

"ticket" includes any other authority to travel or to be present in a part of a station where such an authority is required.

(9) The Secretary of State may by order amend this section for the purpose of varying the meaning in this section of any of the following expressions—

(a) "train–operating function";

(b) "station–operating function";

(c) "outside contractor"; or

(d) "TfL passenger rail service"."

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 158.

Division No. 297] **[7.22 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Barnes, Harry
Ainger, Nick	Barron, Kevin
Alexander, Douglas	Bayley, Hugh
Allen, Graham	Beard, Nigel
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary	Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Ashton, Joe	Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Atherton, Ms Candy	Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Atkins, Charlotte	Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Austin, John	Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*

Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 295 to 331 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 332, after clause 188, to insert the following new clause—*Restrictions on disclosure of information*—

" .—(1) Subject to the following provisions of this section, no information with respect to any particular business which—

(a) has been obtained by the PPP arbiter under or by virtue of any of the provisions of this Chapter, and

(b) relates to the affairs of any individual or to any particular business,

shall, during the lifetime of that individual or so long as that business continues to be carried on, be disclosed without the consent of that individual or the person for the time being carrying on that business.

(2) Subsection (1) above does not apply to any disclosure of information which is made—

(a) for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out by the Secretary of State, the Mayor of London, Transport for London or the PPP arbiter of any of his or, as the case may be, its functions under this Act;

(b) for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out by the Secretary of State, the Rail Regulator, the Franchising Director, the Competition Commission or the Mayor of any of his or, as the case may be, its functions under the Railways Act 1993;

(c) for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out by—

(i) any Minister of the Crown,

(ii) the Director General of Fair Trading,

(iii) the Competition Commission,

(iv) the Director General of Telecommunications,

(v) the Director General of Gas Supply,

(vi) the Director General of Water Supply,

(vii) the Director General of Electricity Supply,

(viii) the Civil Aviation Authority,

(ix) the Insolvency Practitioners Tribunal, or

(x) a local weights and measures authority in Great Britain,

of any of his or, as the case may be, its functions under any of the enactments or instruments specified in subsection (3) below;

(d) for the purpose of enabling or assisting the Secretary of State or the Treasury to exercise any powers conferred by the Financial Services Act 1986 or by the enactments relating to companies, insurance companies or insolvency or for the purpose of enabling or assisting any inspector appointed under the enactments relating to companies to carry out his functions;

(e) for the purpose of enabling or assisting an official receiver to carry out his functions under the enactments relating to insolvency or for the purpose of enabling or assisting a recognised professional body for the purposes of section 391 of the Insolvency Act 1986 to carry out its functions as such;

(f) for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out by the Health and Safety Commission or the Health and Safety Executive of any of its functions under any enactment

or of facilitating the carrying out by any enforcing authority, within the meaning of Part I of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, of any functions under a relevant statutory provision, within the meaning of that Act;

(g) for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out by the Comptroller and Auditor General of any of his functions under any enactment;

(h) for the purpose of facilitating the carrying out by the International Rail Regulator of any of his functions under any subordinate legislation made for the purpose of implementing—

(i) the Directive of the Council of the European Communities dated 29th July 1991 on the development of the Community's railways; or

(ii) Council Directive 95/19/EC on the allocation of railway infrastructure capacity and the charging of infrastructure fees;

(j) in connection with the investigation of any criminal offence or for the purposes of any criminal proceedings;

(k) for the purposes of any civil proceedings brought under or by virtue of this Act or any of the enactments or instruments specified in subsection (3) below; or

(l) in pursuance of a Community obligation.

(3) The enactments and instruments referred to in subsection (2) above are—

(a) the Trade Descriptions Act 1968;

(b) the Fair Trading Act 1973;

(c) the Consumer Credit Act 1974;

(d) the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976;

(e) the Resale Prices Act 1976;

(f) the Estate Agents Act 1979;

(g) the Competition Act 1980;

(h) the Telecommunications Act 1984;

(j) the Airports Act 1986;

(k) the Gas Act 1986;

(l) the Insolvency Act 1986;

(m) the Consumer Protection Act 1987;

(n) the Electricity Act 1989;

(o) the Property Misdescriptions Act 1991;

(p) the Water Industry Act 1991;

(q) the Water Resources Act 1991;

(r) the Railways Act 1993;

(s) any subordinate legislation made for the purpose of securing compliance with the Directive of the Council of the European Communities dated 10th September 1984 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member States concerning misleading advertising.

(4) The Secretary of State may by order provide that subsections (2) and (3) above shall have effect subject to such modifications as are specified in the order.

(5) The prohibition imposed by subsection (1) above shall be enforceable by civil proceedings—

(a) by the individual mentioned in that subsection, or

(b) by the person for the time being carrying on the business there mentioned,

for an injunction or for any other appropriate relief or remedy.

(6) In this section "the Franchising Director" means the Director General of Passenger Rail Franchising."

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 156.

Division No. 298] **[7.36 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric

Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*

St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 333 to 336 agreed to.

Clause 193

TRAVEL CONCESSIONS ON JOURNEYS IN AND AROUND GREATER LONDON

Lords amendment: No. 337, in page 104, line 21, after (" 233") insert ("or 324")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 339, 561, 708 to 711, 713, 716 and 719.

Mr. Hill: The Government understand that the London concessionary fares scheme is much valued by elderly and disabled Londoners. That is why we are firmly committed to ensuring that users of the scheme can continue to enjoy its travel benefits. The Bill makes provision for those travel concessions to continue on services that will transfer from the control of London Transport to Transport for London.

We have given careful consideration to a number of proposals for improvements to the scheme. As a result, we have amended the Bill to update the scheme and to help maintain its stability. For the statutory reserve scheme, the start and finish times will be brought into line with those currently in the voluntary scheme, and arrangements for determining the costs of the reserve scheme will be clarified. We have also given the boroughs powers to set up a statutory joint committee dealing with concessionary fares, which will have the option of taking decisions on the basis of qualified majority voting.

The amendments will bring up to date the concessionary fares provisions first enacted in 1984. They will increase the stability of the scheme by making it easier for the boroughs to reach agreement every year. They will also provide further reassurance to users that concessions will continue to be provided. These amendments have the support of the Association of London Government and users' groups, and were welcomed in the other place.

On penalty fares, the Government have noted the views of Members of both Houses—expressed both during the passage of this Bill and when writing on behalf of constituents—about the operation of London Transport's penalty fares scheme. We are, of course, also aware of the considerable public interest in the subject.

Lords amendment No. 719 requires the Secretary of State to make regulations to establish an independent penalty fares appeal body, if he is requested to do so by the mayor. We think it likely that, once the mayor has taken stock of the penalty fares procedures, he or she will make such a request. We should not, however, wish to prejudge the mayor's consideration of the issue, particularly in the light of the reforms that London Transport has established after its review of tube penalty fares. We think that the mayor will want to see how those reforms bed down before deciding to invoke the powers in the amendment.

The amendment also gives a general indication of the ground that the regulations may cover. If the mayor were to request the Secretary of State to make such regulations, we would expect there to be close consultation between the mayor, the Secretary of State and other interested parties before the regulations were drawn up.

Mr. Burstow: I should like to speak briefly to the amendments dealing with the concessionary fares issue, which concerned hon. Members greatly in our earlier consideration of the Bill. I also want to express our appreciation of the fact that the Government have at last listened to the representations made not only by hon. Members both here and in the other place, but by the many thousands of people across London who asked the Government to think again about the way in which the Bill would have put at risk the future of the London concessionary fares scheme.

I know from my own constituency case load that some of my constituents, particularly those involved in a seniors' forum in my constituency, were most anxious that the provisions should be included in the Bill. I know that they are pleased to note that the scheme is secure, and look forward to seeing it continue well into the future.

Mr. Hill: I express my gratitude for the hon. Gentleman's warm words. We regard inclusion of the provisions as an example of consensual government that should be a model for the way in which the Greater London Authority conducts its business.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 338 and 339 agreed to.

Clause 199

THE LONDON TRANSPORT USERS' COMMITTEE

Lords amendment: No. 340, in page 106, line 29, after ("body") insert ("corporate")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 341 to 345, 347 to 353, 720 to 724 and 803.

Mr. Hill: These are new and exciting times for users of transport services in London, and we believe that, with its

[Mr. Hill]

wider remit, the London Transport Users Committee will successfully build on the best traditions of the London Regional Passengers Committee. As part of the new democratic structures for London, it will ensure that the user's voice is clearly heard when the mayor and Assembly consider transport provision in the capital.

The amendments are essentially technical ones, filling out the LTUC remit and more clearly defining its relationship with the assembly. The amendments also reflect the careful consideration that we have given to some of the points raised by peers of all parties during the Bill's consideration in the other place. Lords amendment No. 341, for example, deals with the concerns of Liberal Democrat Members, both in this place—in particular the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey)—and in the other place—in particular Baroness Thomas of Walliswood and Baroness Hamwee—of ensuring that the committee is properly representative of the wider community of rail users in the area for which the LTUC is a rail user consultative committee. Similarly, Lord Dixon-Smith and Baroness Miller sought assurances on audit and account, which we have provided for in Lords amendment No. 721.

7.45 pm

The amendments also include our proposals for the Assembly to issue guidance and directions to the LTUC and to establish firmly the new relationship between the Assembly and the committee.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment Nos. 341 to 353 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 354, after clause 205, to insert the following new clause—*Provision of facilities to benefit users of waterways—*

("CHAPTER XA—

WATER TRANSPORT

.—(1) Subject to subsection (2) below, Transport for London may provide or secure the provision of such amenities and facilities as it considers would benefit persons using any waterway.

(2) Before commencing any works for the purposes of exercising the powers under subsection (1) above, Transport for London shall—

(a) comply with any requirement in an enactment to obtain a licence or consent in respect of the works, or

(b) if there is no such requirement, obtain the consent to the works of any person who is under a duty to maintain the waterway to which they relate.")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 355, 356 and 697.

Mr. Hill: This group of amendments deals with rivers and waterways. Lords amendment No. 354 gives Transport for London power to provide amenities and facilities on the Thames and other waterways in London. Lords amendment No. 355 transfers responsibility for the operation of the Woolwich ferry. Lords amendment No. 356 ensures that there is no doubt about the validity of transfers of property, rights and liabilities that are transferred to London Regional Transport between 31 March 1999 and the coming into force of this clause, or that are subject to transfer agreements made during that period. Lords amendment No. 697 provides Transport for London with a power to make byelaws about piers that it owns or operates.

There was considerable debate in another place on some of the amendments in this group. In the light of concerns expressed by the Port of London authority and British Waterways, the clauses were further amended in another place. Therefore, Lords amendment No. 354 clarifies that Transport for London must obtain any necessary consents or licences before commencing works on waterway amenities or facilities, and Lords amendment No. 697 ensures that TfL byelaws for landing places do not conflict or interfere with certain byelaws made by the Port of London authority.

Tourism and the river have been a subject of concern to Members in both Houses. The Government, of course, recognise the importance of tourism to river services. However, we have taken note of the concerns that have been expressed by hon. Members in this and the other place on behalf of a particular operator.

The Government's proposals for the mayor and TfL envisage an integrated approach to the use of the river, which is not limited purely to public passenger transport. The mayor will be responsible for promoting both public transport and tourism. Ahead of the provisions coming into effect, the Government expect London River Services—as a predecessor body to TfL—to work in a similar manner. We have every confidence that it is doing just that. The Government have listened to the concerns that have been expressed—which is why my noble Friend Lord Whitty recently undertook that we would write to the chairman of London River Services to reiterate the point. We shall be doing so shortly.

I hope that that further explanation will reassure hon. Members that the interests of tourism on the river are fully recognised in the Bill's provisions and in the interim period before TfL is established.

Mr. Brooke: The alliance to which the Minister referred consists of the hon. Members for Upminster (Mr. Darvill), for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and me. We discussed the matter in Committee, but did so before some of the developments had occurred. There is no possibility that I shall be able today to do justice to the subject, and I can only plead—through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and given the fact that it is an all-party coalition—that Madam Speaker might be prepared to contemplate granting an Adjournment debate on the subject early in the next Session.

The Minister—whom I acknowledge knows about the issues—said that Lord Whitty will be writing to the chairman of London River Services. Although that calmed nerves in their Lordships' House, I should myself feel much better if he included in the letter an expectation, first, that London River Services will appoint a director with experience of and responsibility for tourism, and secondly, that an independent study will be made of the current impact of the introduction of transport services on current tourism services, so that both perspectives could be understood and viewed in a more balanced manner.

8 pm

Mr. Hill: I take note of the right hon. Gentleman's observations, and look forward to further exchanges in the Chamber on that subject.

It being Eight o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to the Order this day.*

Lords amendment agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Lords amendments No. 419 and Government amendment (a) thereto and No. 793 and Government amendments (a) to (f) thereto agreed to.

Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the remaining Lords amendments:—

The House divided: Ayes 347, Noes 133.

Division No. 299] **[8.2 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(Birmingham H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oiner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris

Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments agreed to.

Consequential Government amendment agreed to.

Clause 243

ESTABLISHMENT, MEMBERSHIP AND DUTY TO MAINTAIN POLICE FORCE

Lords amendment: No. 426, in page 133, leave out lines 24 to 29 and insert—

> ("(c) the person or body responsible for the appointment of members of the Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority under regulations made under section 30B of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997 (which, by virtue of paragraph 5(b) of Schedule 2A to this Act, appoints magistrates to be members of the Metropolitan Police Authority).")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 745 to 758 and 779 to 781.

Mr. Raynsford: All the amendments in this group are connected with the membership of the Metropolitan police authority. They fall into three categories which I will address in turn—magistrate members of the MPA, the position of the deputy mayor on the MPA and the upper age limit of MPA members.

Amendment No. 426 heads a set of seven amendments which deal with the appointment of magistrate members of the Metropolitan police authority. Now that the Access to Justice Act 1999 has been passed, we need to make a number of changes to reflect the new arrangements that will apply to the administration of magistrates courts in London.

Amendment No. 748 is the key amendment. It will substitute new arrangements for the appointment of the four magistrate members of the MPA. Paragraph 5 of schedule 21 to the Bill, as introduced in the other place, provided that the appointments would be made by a joint committee of the selection panels for the magistrates courts committees within the Metropolitan police district. There are 21 such selection panels, so it would be quite a task for them to join together to form a single panel to make the appointments.

As the House will be aware, the Access to Justice Act 1999 establishes a new Londonwide body called the Greater London magistrates courts authority. That body will replace the existing magistrates courts committees in London, which will in turn mean the disappearance of the MCC selection panels.

The GLMCA will not assume its full powers until April 2001, but work is already under way in relation to the appointment of its members. A selection panel is to be set up for that purpose around the turn of the year, and we think that that panel would be the ideal body to make the four magistrate appointments to the MPA. This is what Amendment No. 748 will achieve.

Amendment No. 426 is consequential. It provides that the body or person who makes appointments to the GLMCA—the selection panel to which I have just referred—must be consulted by the Secretary of State when he is considering reducing the number of MPA members. That will replace the current provision in the Bill whereby it is the MCC selection panels that must be consulted. Amendments Nos. 747, 753, 756, 757 and 758 make further changes consequent on the passage of the Access to Justice Act 1999.

Amendments Nos. 745 and 755 clarify a couple of matters regarding the position of the deputy mayor on the Metropolitan police authority. Amendment No. 755 provides that the deputy mayor will cease to be a member of the MPA if he or she ceases to be deputy mayor. The Bill already makes specific provision as to what should happen when the deputy mayor acts as the mayor, and in such cases he or she will sometimes be required to step down temporarily from the MPA.

The Bill as introduced into the other place was silent, however, on what should happen if the deputy mayor ceased to be the deputy—for example, following a resignation. Amendment No. 755 will rectify that position. As the deputy has his or her place by virtue of that office, we think it right that that individual should be required to step down as a member of the MPA on losing that office. Equally, provided that he or she remains an Assembly member, there is no reason why he or she should not remain eligible for reappointment to the MPA in his or her capacity as an Assembly member. That will be possible by virtue of paragraph 18 of schedule 21.

Amendment No. 745 makes it clear that the deputy mayor will be subject to the disqualification criteria for MPA membership as set out in paragraph 8 of schedule 21. Those provisions cover standard disqualification issues such as bankruptcy and criminal convictions, and are very similar to those which the Bill applies to Assembly members, and hence to the deputy mayor.

8.15 pm

The third set of amendments will remove the upper age limit to membership of the Metropolitan police authority. The Bill as introduced into the other place barred those aged 70 and over from being MPA members. The origin of that age limit, which applies to all police authorities, seems to be linked to the position of magistrates. Since magistrates have to retire at 70, magistrate members of police authorities have to resign on reaching that age. The reasoning appears to have been that equality of misery should be applied to other police authority members.

The Bill had echoed the position in other police authorities, in line with our general approach that the structures and functions of the MPA should, as far as possible, be the same as those of authorities outside London. However, on reconsideration, it seemed wrong to exclude from police authority membership perfectly able people of advancing years. Amendment No. 749 therefore removes the upper age limit for MPA members. The Government will bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity to remove the upper age limit for other police authorities in England and Wales.

The other amendments in this group are consequential on amendment No. 749. They amend or remove references elsewhere in schedule 21 and also in schedule 3, to the Police Act 1996 as amended by schedule 2 of the Bill, which relate to the age limit of MPA membership or membership of the MPA independent member selection panel.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I support the proposals regarding membership of the MPA and the age limits involved. However, a question arises that I ask in ignorance as I do not know the answer. Will it be possible for the new Metropolitan police authority, whose democratisation we welcome, to change the age limits for officers in the police service? I will quite understand if the Minister cannot answer me now, but the new MPA is to be slightly different from other police authorities in the country. How much autonomy will it have over the management of its service, and to what extent will it be governed by the legislation covering the other police services in England and Wales?

It would be wonderful—and more than I expect—if the Minister could give me an answer now. An answer later is what I expect, but in any event I hope that I get one.

Mr. Raynsford: I have to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, as I cannot give him an answer now. However, I undertake to write to him with the information that he seeks. I reiterate that the change that the Bill makes with regard to the Metropolitan police authority will be followed by legislation applying to other police authorities elsewhere in the country to remove the upper age limit.

Lords amendment agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 427, after clause 253, to insert the following new clause—*Continuation in post of current Commissioners and Commanders—*

(" .—(1) Any appointment of a person as the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis under section 1 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1829 which is in force immediately before the coming into force of section 248 above shall have effect as from the coming into force of that section as the appointment of that person as the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis under and in accordance with section 9B of the Police Act 1996.

(2) If, immediately before the coming into force of section 250 above, there is in force in respect of a person who is one of the Assistant Commissioners of Police of the Metropolis an authorisation under section 8 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1856 (authorisation of one of the Assistant Commissioners to act as Commissioner in case of vacancy, illness or absence) that person shall be taken, as from the coming into force of section 250 above, to have been appointed as the Deputy Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis under and in accordance with section 9D of the Police Act 1996.

(3) Any appointment of a person (other than a person in relation to whom subsection (2) above has effect) as an Assistant Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis under section 2 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1856 which is in force immediately before the coming into force of section 252 above shall have effect as from the coming into force of that section as the appointment of that person as an Assistant Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis under and in accordance with section 9F of the Police Act 1996.

(4) Any appointment of a person as a Commander in the metropolitan police force which is in force immediately before the coming into force of section 253 above shall have effect as from the coming into force of that section as the appointment of that person as a Commander under and in accordance with section 9G of the Police Act 1996.")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 428, 429, 535, 584, 585, 759 to 776, 782 to 785, 796 to 798 and 808 to 819.

Mr. Raynsford: As the House will be aware, this group of amendments covers four separate areas. I beg the House's indulgence to take a little time to explain their significance.

The four areas covered are: senior ranks of the Metropolitan police; the secondment of Met officers to county forces affected by changes to the boundary of the Metropolitan police district; pensions of civilian staff of the Met; and consequential amendments to various statutes. I shall take each set of amendments in turn.

Amendments Nos. 427 and 428 are concerned with the ranks of the Metropolitan police force. Amendment No. 427 inserts a new clause which makes transitional provision in respect of those individuals in one of the four senior ranks of the Metropolitan police—commissioner, deputy commissioner, assistant commissioner or commander—on the date when the new provisions applying to the appointment of those ranks come into force. That date will be the 3 July 2000. The new clause provides that those individuals will be deemed to have been appointed under the new arrangements inserted into the Police Act 1996 by the Bill, rather than under the various Acts covering the Metropolitan police, under which they would originally have been appointed.

Amendment No. 428 clarifies the wording in new section 9H of the 1996 Act, which sets out the ranks that may be held in the Metropolitan police. These are the four senior ranks to which I have already referred, and the ranks of superintendent, chief inspector, inspector, sergeant and constable.

The wording of the Bill as introduced into another place might have been regarded as being ambiguous about whether the four senior ranks are indeed to be regarded as ranks of the Metropolitan police force. It is the intention that they should be treated as ranks and accordingly subject to regulations made under section 50 of the 1996 Act. The amended wording puts the matter beyond doubt.

The next amendment, No. 429, deals with the secondment of Met officers. The new clause inserted by the amendment gives power to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to provide police officers to the county police forces of Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey. Those three forces will have the area that they police enlarged on 1 April 2000, when the boundaries of the Metropolitan police district are reduced to bring them into line with the outer boundary of Greater London. Changes to these boundaries are provided for by clause 255 of the Bill.

In order to police their enlarged areas, Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey will need additional officers. It is of paramount importance that there is a seamless transfer of responsibilities between the Met and the county forces on 1 April 2000, so that the public do not suffer any loss of service during the handover period.

The new clause will enable Met officers to be loaned to the county forces for a period of time which we would expect to be between six months and two years. During that period, they will retain the pay and allowances of a Metropolitan police officer, but will be under the direction and control of the chief constable of the force to which they have been seconded. At the conclusion of the secondment period, the officers would return to the Met.

The third set of amendments is concerned with pensions. As the House will know, we wish to ensure that the organisational changes that we are introducing to London do not adversely affect the terms and conditions of the staff involved. That extends to their pension rights.

Amendment No. 763, which is introduced by amendment No. 762, makes changes to section 15 of the Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1967, which governs the payment of pensions to the civil staff of the Metropolitan police. These staff are on the Metropolitan civil staff superannuation scheme, which is analogous to the principal civil service pension scheme. This means that such staff receive the same benefits as civil servants.

Amendment No. 763 supersedes the minor amendments to section 15 of the 1967 Act, which schedule 22 to the Bill already provides. It has a number of features. First, it amends the definition of who is a member of the Metropolitan civil staffs—that is, the definition of those staff who are members of the MCSSS. At present, there are two categories within this definition. One group is staff employed under the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, or the receiver. The other category is made up of justices clerks in inner London. The latter category is not changed by the amendment, but the first is changed to staff who are employed by the Metropolitan police authority. This reflects the fact that the MPA will become the employer of Met staff on 3 July 2000.

Secondly, the amendment preserves entitlements to benefits accrued under the MCSSS scheme by staff who are not current employees on 3 July 2000, and who are not therefore within this definition.

Thirdly, the amendment provides for circumstances in which staff currently on the MCSSS—or who have built up entitlements under that scheme—might move on to another pension scheme. These are set out in sub-paragraph (2D) for post-July 2000 members of the MCSSS and in sub-paragraph (9) for former members of the MCSSS who have benefit entitlements.

Amendment No. 535 inserts an extra provision into clause 322, which requires that the Secretary of State must consult with the MPA and obtain the consent of the Minister with responsibility for the civil service before making an order under that section relating to pension transfers of MPA employees. The likely purpose of any such order would be to place those employees on to the PCSPS. As I have already mentioned, clause 309 includes the MPA among the list of bodies covered by section 1 of the Superannuation Act 1972.

Hon. Members will be extremely relieved to know that I come now to the final set of amendments, which make various consequential changes to legislation dating back to the last century. Schedule 22 already makes numerous such changes, which are required to reflect the creation of the Metropolitan police authority and the eventual abolition of the office of receiver. The amendments add a few more to that list and to the repeal schedule—schedule 27. They apply various provisions to the MPA to bring it into line with other police authorities and delete a few more references to the receiver. Such references will be repealed as and when the powers are no longer exercised by the receiver. The amendments remove some references to Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner, which will no longer be needed once those two posts are made police ranks, and tidy up a couple of references affected by the Access to Justice Act 1999.

Mr. Simon Hughes: We should like to place on record our thanks to the receiver—as we did in Committee—whose post will disappear in the transition. The receiver is a real person, despite having a title that most people would not understand. Intriguingly, he has played a constitutionally significant role in the history of the Met, and has been important in terms of its expenditure. In my experience, he has always done the job courteously and helpfully, and has assisted colleagues in trying to get to the bottom of matters that concern us and our constituents. We thank him for his work.

Secondly, we support the Government's proposal to rationalise the boundaries of the Met with those of Greater London. That was not in the original Green Paper, but was agreed as a result of representations, and the new arrangements will give a logical boundary to the Met. It is therefore sensible, as the Minister said, for a transitional arrangement to allow people who are serving in Metropolitan police district areas which are in the counties surrounding Greater London to be temporarily seconded. We are relieved to note that they will return to the Met, which, on this occasion, will not be the subject of salami-slicing. The numbers are well below establishment and we should like to see them return to establishment levels.

Thirdly—and I merely flag this up, as I know the Home Office is responsible for policing in the broader context—the police pensions bill in England and Wales rises every year, as more police officers retire, but the pensions must be funded out of the allocated money to police forces under the normal budgetary allocations. My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and others have referred to the possibility of the pensions of fire, civil defence and ambulance personnel being taken out of the normal revenue budget context, sooner rather than later, and put somewhere else. In that way, a huge increase in pensions payments would not have to be paid for out of any increase in revenue provided by the Government in a particular year, which would be a welcome development.

I appreciate that the Minister cannot simply announce a new policy now, but a request to colleagues in the Treasury and the Home Office as well as those in his Department to look positively at such proposals would be widely welcomed.

Mr. Raynsford: I wish to associate the Government with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the excellent work done by the receiver over 170-odd years.

Mr. Hughes: Not the same one.

Mr. Raynsford: Of course not, but the post goes back a long time. I have to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, however, because although the Bill presages the disappearance of the post of receiver, it can be seen from the next group of amendments that that does not happen quite yet. The receiver will have a role to play for a bit longer.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the boundary changes and the transition arrangements. I shall not rise to the bait in respect of his comments about police numbers.

The hon. Gentleman's third point about pension costs goes far wider than the Bill's remit, as he recognised. His comments are on the record and will be seen by my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Home Secretary, but it would be wrong for me to make a commitment on something that goes far wider than the debate before us.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 428 and 429 agreed to.

Clause 256

ABOLITION OF OFFICE OF RECEIVER

Lords amendment: No. 430, to leave out clause 256

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 431, 432, 558, 560 and 570.

Mr. Raynsford: It is the Government's policy that the criminal justice agencies should share the same boundaries, namely those of the police force areas in England and Wales. In the case of probation, that means that the existing 54 probation services must become 42. In all, 20 probation services will be involved in amalgamations, which we intend shall take effect on 1 April 2001.

[Mr. Raynsford]

In London, the five existing services—Inner London, South-East London, South-West London, Middlesex and North-East London—need to merge to form a new service for Greater London. Section 2 of the Probation Service Act 1993 contains an order-making power to amalgamate probation services. However, there is a problem in relation to the creation of a single London probation service, in that the 1993 Act clearly envisages that there shall be more than one probation service in London. We have concluded that to make an order amalgamating the London services under the existing provision would go beyond the vires of that provision. Our amendments will allow us to proceed with the London amalgamation. The new clause inserted by Lords amendment No. 431 provides an order-making power to that effect.

Our amendments also deal with the abolition of the receiver, an issue which arises because of the Inner London probation service's links to that office. To clarify my earlier remarks, the receiver will have a continuing responsibility in the transitional period until the new probation arrangements come into force.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 431 and 432 agreed to.

Clause 262

DISCHARGE OF FUNCTIONS

Lords amendment: No. 433, in page 140, line 37, leave out ("for")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 434, 786, 787, 789 and 790.

Mr. Raynsford: Lords amendments Nos. 433 and 434 deal with the power of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, LFEPA, to co-opt on to its committees and sub-committees individuals who are not members of the GLA. The need for the amendments emerged from consultation with the current fire authority and the Association of London Government. The effect of clause 262(2) is that a person may not be a co-opted member of a committee of LFEPA unless he or she is a member of a London borough council, the common council or the Assembly. That is more prescriptive than the present arrangements, and the amendments are intended to bring the Bill much more into line with existing law.

Lords amendment No. 786 arose from discussions with the Association of London Government. It sets out the action to be taken if a vacancy arises in the office of chairman of LFEPA. Paragraph 3(1) of schedule 23 requires the mayor in each year to appoint a chairman from among the members of the authority. Comparable legislation expressly provides for the filling of a vacancy in the office of chairman. The amendment therefore provides that, in the event of a vacancy arising in that office, the mayor will be required to appoint a new chairman from among the members of LFEPA as soon as possible.

Lords amendment No. 787 is a minor technical amendment dealing with inconsistent wording in paragraph 3 of schedule 23. It substitutes the word "appoint" for "elect" in paragraph 3(2), so that the same word appears throughout the paragraph. The wording used is consistent with other local government legislation.

The last two amendments relate to the consequential changes to legislation listed in schedule 24. Lords amendment No. 789 is a minor technical amendment to legislation affecting fire service pensions. For public service pensions increase legislation to apply to pension awards payable by LFEPA in the same way as it does to the current fire authority, a minor amendment is required to the Pensions (Increase) Act 1971.

Lords amendment No. 790 will apply to LFEPA a provision that applies to the current fire authority. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposes a duty on certain authorities to exercise their functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do what is possible to prevent, crime and disorder.

I hope that the House will support all those amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 434 agreed to.

Clause 264

THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Lords amendment: No. 435, in page 141, line 13, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

("( ) The spatial development strategy must include statements dealing with the general spatial development aspects of—

(a) such of the other strategies prepared and published, or to be prepared and published, under the enactments mentioned in section 33(1) above as involve considerations of spatial development, and

(b) such of the Mayor's other policies or proposals as involve such considerations,

whether or not the strategy, policy or proposal relates to the development or use of land.")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 436 to 438, 442, 443 and 452.

Mr. Raynsford: Amendment No. 435 defines more succinctly, taking into account clause 33(5), the relationship between the mayor's spatial development strategy and other strategies. Discussion in Commons Committee revealed some difficulties of interpretation, so we have taken the opportunity to rationalise and improve the wording of existing subsection (4). The amendment is, therefore, a drafting amendment, which clarifies that the mayor's spatial development strategy must cover the spatial aspects of his or her other strategies and policies.

Amendments Nos. 436 and 437 arise from a commitment that the Government gave in another place to consider an amendment proposed by the Liberal Democrats. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has left the Chamber, at the very moment when I was about to

say something nice about his contribution. However, I am sure that his hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) will relay to him my comments. The amendments ensure that, when deciding to whom consultation copies of the SDS should be sent, the mayor has to consider relevant bodies under the descriptions specified in clause 27(3)—the general consultation clause—as well as the consultees set out in part VIII of the Bill.

Government amendment No. 438 arises from my agreement in Committee to consider an amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. It places a duty on the mayor to notify any withdrawal of the draft SDS to those who are consulted during the preparation of the strategy and on the draft. At present, the Bill requires only that those who have made representations about the SDS—rather than those who have been formally consulted—should be informed. We accepted that there might possibly have been a gap, and were thus happy to accept the hon. Gentleman's amendment, because his approach seemed to be constructive.

Amendment No. 442 clarifies, for the avoidance of doubt, that the regulations that we are producing for the SDS may include procedures to be followed by the mayor to ensure that the Secretary of State has an opportunity to exercise the power of direction over the strategy referred to in clause 267.

Amendment No. 443 clarifies that the Secretary of State's power to direct amendment of the SDS can be made at any point before publication—not just on the consultation draft.

Amendment No. 452 is, in essence, a tidying-up amendment in relation to the mayor's role in representing London's interests to the rest of the south-east. It clarifies that the mayor is able to represent London's collective interests on planning matters on any relevant body, not merely one that is made up solely of local authority membership.

Lords amendment No. 435 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 436 to 438 agreed to.

Clause 267

PUBLICATION

Lords amendment: No. 439, in page 143, line 5, leave out ("findings reported") and insert ("report made")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 440, 441, 444 and 447 to 450.

Mr. Raynsford: Amendments Nos. 439, 440, 441 and 444 arise from commitments made by the Government in another place to consider Opposition amendments relating to the report of the chair or of the panel of the examination in public into the spatial development strategy. Our intention is that the report of an EIP panel should include not merely findings of fact, but recommendations. After the debates held in the House during the past week over the report of the EIP panel into the south-east regional planning guidance, some hon. Members might question the view that there should be recommendations. However, the notion that the panel should make recommendations, rather than including only findings of fact, is very much part of our approach. Concern was expressed that the current term, "findings", may be too narrow to encompass "recommendations". In planning Acts and secondary legislation, the term "report" is more often used. We believe that that would be a more appropriate word: the amendments therefore change relevant references in the Bill from "findings" to "report."

8.45 pm

The Bill as it stands provides for the Secretary of State to give the mayor by way of a development order the power to direct a London borough to refuse planning permission. Amendment No. 447 provides clarification to make certain that, when the Secretary of State makes such a development order, he can also impose a duty on the mayor to give reasons when he or she uses the power to direct refusal.

Amendments Nos. 448 and 449 arise from a commitment I gave to consider an amendment tabled in Committee by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). They provide that the mayor shall have regard to the unitary development plan and the spatial development strategy, so far as they are material to the application, when considering using his or her power to direct refusal of planning permission.

Amendment No. 450 also arises from Government commitments given in another place to consider amendments proposed by the Opposition. We have always made it clear that the mayor will be liable for the costs of holding an appeal inquiry and the costs of other parties where the mayor has directed refusal of planning permission unreasonably. That is an important discipline and safeguard. The amendment puts that provision on the face of the Bill and ensures that an order for costs can be made, whether or not the mayor participates in an inquiry.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 440 to 450 agreed to.

Clause 276

MONITORING AND DATA COLLECTION

Lords amendment: No. 451, in page 148, line 9, leave out subsections (2) to (7)

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 500 to 511.

Mr. Hill: Amendments Nos. 451 and 508 to 511 set the framework within which the mayor can work with London boroughs and the common council to promote research and monitoring work. They provide for the continuing involvement of London local authorities in pan-London research and ensure that the mayor has all the tools necessary to inform the development and monitor the implementation of strategies.

The amendments supersede the amendments on monitoring in clause 276, reflecting points raised in consideration of those provisions in another place,

[Mr. Hill]

especially about the need to ensure that excessive burdens are not placed on London local authorities. I gave an undertaking to table amendments to meet those concerns. During their development, the amendments have been the subject of close consultation between the Government and representatives of London government. I am grateful to my noble Friend Lord Harris of Haringey for his considerable help with them.

Amendments Nos. 500 to 506 fulfil the Government's commitment to tidy up the mayor's power to obtain information, advice and assistance from the functional bodies. The effect is to limit the duty to supply information, advice and assistance to that which the mayor may reasonably require for the exercise of his or her functions. The amendments also simplify the Secretary of State's power, by order, to make appropriate arrangements to protect privacy and confidentiality. We anticipate that the arrangements will be based on Part VA of the Local Government Act 1972.

Amendment No. 507 corrects a loophole that we noticed in the provisions of clause 315, which provides the Secretary of State with a fallback power enabling him to instruct the GLA to make research data that it has collected available to others, in recognition of the important role it is to inherit from the London Research Centre. However, the existing provisions do not extend to research work carried out by predecessor bodies but inherited by the GLA. The amendment makes it clear that the Secretary of State's power should extend to enabling him to instruct the GLA to make available information transferred to it under the transfer provisions in clauses 319 and 320.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 452 agreed to.

Clause 281

THE MAYOR'S ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

Lords amendment: No. 453, in page 150, line 3, at end insert—

("( ) biodiversity,")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 454, 456, 480 and 481.

Mr. Hill: Amendments Nos. 453 and 454 concern the state of the environment report. Amendment No. 453 would add biodiversity to the list of issues that the report should cover. We are grateful to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) for spotting that omission in Committee.

Amendment No. 454 would delete the detailed definition of information that the mayor would be required to provide in the report under the heading, "road traffic levels". That definition should be up to the mayor.

Amendment No. 456 is also simple. On 1 April this year, the Countryside Commission merged with the Rural Development Commission. The new organisation is now known as the Countryside Agency, and the amendment would merely ensure that the correct name was on the face of the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 480 and 481 would correct an anomaly in the Bill. Hon. Members will note that the Bill abolishes three existing organisations—the London Planning Advisory Committee, the London Ecology Committee and the London Research Centre—which are all due to be subsumed into the main body of the Greater London Authority.

We have already made clear our intention to abolish the three organisations on 1 April 2000 to allow a smooth transition to the new Authority. However, the Bill, as currently drafted, allows us to abolish the London Ecology Committee only

"on the establishment of the Authority"—

that is, after the GLA elections have taken place. That will not allow us to plan properly in advance—as is clearly desirable—for the establishment of the GLA. The amendments would correct the position and allow us to abolish the London Ecology Committee at the same time as LPAC and LRC, on 1 April 2000.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I thank the Minister for his gracious words. It would be mealy-mouthed to point out that I had to wait a long time for the amendment to be tabled. The Minister was gracious enough in Committee to say that such an amendment could be made to the Bill. It is a lesson to new Members of Parliament like me that patience is sometimes rewarded. I have not worked out the great difference between the amendment and the original amendment that required expert draftsmanship, but I am nevertheless grateful.

Mr. Brake: I hope that the Minister will concede that Liberal Democrat Members also raised the matter on several occasions. We were keen for the mayor's state of the environment report to reflect biodiversity. I should not nit-pick, but it is surprising that biodiversity was originally omitted from the Bill.

Londoners are worried about biodiversity. In a debate last week, I referred to the threat to London's biodiversity that developments associated with the millennium dome present. Biodiversity should be reflected in the mayor's report. When he or she produces a strategy and environmental statement, I hope that it will help to drive local biodiversity plans, many of which are in abeyance and are waiting for a kick-start from the London mayor. Therefore, I support the amendment.

Mr. Hill: Although I acknowledge the contribution that Liberal Democrats Members have made, we should be in no doubt that the amendment is a monument to the hon. Member for Uxbridge. We are enormously grateful, and congratulate him on what posterity will record as the Uxbridge amendment.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment Nos. 454 to 456 agreed to.

Clause 286

DIRECTIONS BY THE MAYOR

Lords amendment: No. 457, in page 152, line 29, leave out from

("direction") to end of line 31

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 458 to 466.

Mr. Hill: The way in which the Bill was previously drafted may have resulted in some ambiguity concerning the use of the mayor's powers of direction. Over the summer, my officials held several meetings with representatives of the boroughs and the joint waste disposal authorities, so as to tease out the problems that could exist in the interface between the mayor's power of direction and the contractual nature of waste management. Once the position was clarified, my officials consulted every borough on our proposals, and I am pleased to be able to say that, for the most part, our proposals were warmly welcomed.

This group of amendments clarifies the scope of the mayor's power of direction, setting out how that power can be made to sit with the contractual nature of local authority waste management while retaining mayoral influence over municipal waste management in London. It is important to remember that the mayor's effectiveness in that matter, to some extent, depends, on the influence that he has, through his power of direction, over existing and new contracts. We recognise that most long-term contracts will make allowances for some flexibility and adjustment, which will allow the mayor some room for manoeuvre. However, it was never our intention that the mayor should be able to use the power of direction to require an authority to exercise a so-called "break clause" in a contract.

Such a use of that power could lead to authorities incurring substantial financial penalties and would have serious effects on London's waste management. It would certainly result in an increase in the cost of waste contracts as companies sought to cover the increased financial risk, and it could even result in companies not being prepared to enter contracts because they considered the risk too high. That would have very serious consequences for London.

The amendments clarify the proposals that we set out in the White Paper, which did not go into detail about the mayor's power of direction.

Mr. Woodward: We are all grateful for the work that the Minister and his officials carried out in the summer with a view to removing the ambiguity in the clause. However, has the ambiguity been finally removed? Some further clarification is necessary.

The amendment would clarify the mayor's powers with regard to the contractual nature of local authority waste management. However, it still poses more questions. The mayor's specific powers remain unclear and the amendment does not clarify whether the mayor would be obliged to have regard to the cost, practicality and environmental benefit of the waste management in question. What regard to cost would the mayor be obliged to have, and how specifically would those costs be audited and monitored?

Mr. Brake: I support the amendments, but wish to express a few words of caution.

It is entirely appropriate that a local authority should not be forced to terminate an existing contract. Equally, it is right that a local authority should inform the mayor of the impending expiry of any contract. That is desirable, because there will be opportunities for economies of scale at a London level, for Londonwide recycling projects and for waste-minimisation initiatives.

The mayor will have to tread carefully. The mayor should not use a stick against local authorities such as mine, the London borough of Sutton, which have effective waste-minimisation and recycling initiatives. There would be strong objections if the mayor attempted to overrule the local authority, even if it were perceived to be doing something slightly different from what the mayor desired.

9 pm

Mr. Brooke: I reinforce the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward). Obviously, I do not have the *Hansard* record of how the Minister opened his speech, but my recollection is that he said that there might have been some ambiguity. As I remember it, that ambiguity unquestionably existed when we first considered the Bill, and I recall asking some probing questions. As the text of my probing questions is not of the same importance as those I asked in an earlier exchange with the Minister for Housing and Planning, I shall not bore the House with the date or the column reference in the *Official Report*.

Because there unquestionably was ambiguity at the beginning, I join my hon. Friend in thanking the Minister and his officials for the work that has been done in the summer, but I want to make certain that any last ambiguity has been squeezed out before we leave the matter.

Mr. Hill: Let me—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister requires leave.

Mr. Hill: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With the leave of the House, may I say that I am grateful to the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) for raising an important issue.

On the issue of cost, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the explanatory note, which clearly states that there are further specific provisions to deal with contracts caught under public procurement regulations. When authorities are seeking offers in relation to the proposed contract under the public procurement procedures, they must generally issue two notices, the first containing general information—for example, as to the nature and extent of services to be provided—and the second advertising the authority's invitation to seek offers. The first is usually general in nature, and the second more specific.

Once the second notice is published, the authority cannot substantially alter the terms without having to go through the procedure again. The amendment ensures that the mayor cannot issue a direction once the second notice has been sent to the *Official Journal* of the European Communities in order that public procurement procedures are not frustrated.

The mayor must have regard to the best practical environmental option, as set out in the Secretary of State's guidance, to which the mayor must have recourse. The

[Mr. Hill]

mayor must consult the authority before issuing directions, and take into account a number of considerations in dealing with those matters, of which cost will be one. For the better information of the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), I undertake to write to him on the matter.

In response to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake), may I say that I am aware of the high standards achieved by his borough on waste minimisation. The mayor must in no way impinge upon those excellent standards. Indeed, we would expect such an example of best practice to be widely disseminated throughout the new Authority area.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 458 to 466 agreed to.

Clause 294

DIRECTIONS UNDER THE ENVIRONMENT ACT 1995

Lords amendment: No. 467, in page 156, line 4, leave out from beginning to ("The") in line 10 and insert—

("(3) After subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(4A)")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 468 to 471.

Mr. Hill: This group of amendments corrects an anomaly in the Bill relating to the mayor's powers to direct London local authorities in respect of Community air quality obligations and international agreements.

As hon. Members are aware, clause 294 devolves to the mayor the powers of direction under section 85 of the Environment Act 1995. Those powers relate to the local air quality management functions of London local authorities. For example, the mayor could direct a London authority to carry out a review and assessment of air quality in its area, or to prepare an action plan if it appears that air quality standards are unlikely to be met. However, section 85(5) of the 1995 Act includes the power to direct London local authorities "for the implementation of" Community air quality obligations and international agreements. That power can be used in an essentially legislative manner to transpose such obligations.

It has never been intended that the mayor should have the legislative function of transposition. After all, the mayor is not a law-making body. Rather, he should police Community obligations once they have been transposed by the Secretary of State, as well as policing the operation of the local air quality management system in London.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 468 to 471 agreed to.

Clause 297

THE LONDON AMBIENT NOISE STRATEGY

Lords amendment: No. 472, in page 157, line 13, leave out ("contain") and insert ("consist of").

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 473 to 479.

Mr. Hill: The amendments clarify what is expected from the mayor's strategy so as better to reflect the intentions of the White Paper. We have defined what the strategy may consist of, removed the separate reference to the spatial development strategy and ensured that the Environment Agency is consulted when the mayor prepares or revises his strategy. We have provided that the mayor's strategy may contain information about the impact of noise on those living and working in London.

In response to Opposition amendments, "ambient noise" now includes transport rather than transport services and the mayor may include other descriptions of noise that he considers to be appropriate. There is provision for including in the strategy noise caused by aircraft and traffic and noise from a fixed industrial source. The White Paper commitment was that the mayor would not deal with neighbour noise and we have ensured that local authorities and the Health and Safety Executive will continue to deal with matters using powers under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

There are two additional provisions. We have placed a duty on any person providing air navigation services to consult the mayor, where it is reasonably practicable to do so, when the provision of those services would have a significant adverse effect on the level or distribution of noise in Greater London or any part of Greater London.

The duty is limited to air navigation services only so far as they amount to the lateral or vertical alteration or addition of routes used regularly by civil aircraft before landing at, or after departing from, any aerodrome; or substantial alterations to the procedures used for managing the arrival of civil aircraft at aerodromes. It does not apply in relation to tactical decisions necessary in day-to-day air traffic control. The mayor will also be added to the list of organisations to be consulted by aerodromes designated under section 35 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982.

Mr. Woodward: I have a simple question about amendment No. 478 for the Minister. As so many other hon. Members wish to speak, doubtless his officials will be given the chance to scramble some answer to him. Under the amendment, the mayor will have the right to be consulted on new flights and flight paths and be allowed to give his opinion. Opinions are all well and good, as we in the House know, but the crucial question is, what force will his opinion have on the air navigation services?

Mr. McDonnell: I echo that question. It would be helpful to have clarification of the weight that will be given

to the mayor's opinion on this matter. From my constituency perspective, I wholeheartedly welcome the amendment, which will give us the opportunity for further debate about the impact of noise on many of our constituents in west London. It will give us a further lever to influence the direction and flow of aircraft and reduce the impact of noise on our communities as a result of that. I hope that it will also allow us to confirm some of the issues that we need to debate in connection with any further planning proposals that the British Airport Authority makes for Heathrow and a potential third runway.

Mr. Brake: I suspect that the same question will be asked three times, so that will save the Minister time. I echo what other hon. Members have said: I am pleased that the impact of noise on those who live and work in Greater London will appear in the ambient noise strategy and that aircraft noise will be included in that. However, the Minister must clarify exactly what he means when he says that any person providing air navigation services must consult the mayor. Residents in south-west London are glad that the mayor will be consulted, but if an increasing number of flights still goes over their heads at all times of the day and night, that will not give them much satisfaction.

Mr. Hill: First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) for welcoming the provisions. I am aware that he is closely concerned with the issues and that a consultation on runway alterations has taken place locally. That is exactly the sort of issue that the mayor and the Assembly would be expected to deal with in due course.

The hon. Members for Witney (Mr. Woodward) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) asked what force the mayor's opinion will have. The simple truth is that the mayor has no absolute powers in this matter. However, he or she will be an influential person, personally elected by 7 million Londoners. It is therefore entirely predictable and reasonable that the mayor's representations will be seriously taken into account by the relevant authorities. It remains the case, however, that it is an opinion in a process of consultation, and consultation means that views have to be taken into account before a final decision is made.

To some extent, the question is akin to the sort of question that constituents might ask about representations made by Members of Parliament—I am certainly often asked about the force of my representation. We cannot always quantify the force of our representation, but as individuals with a democratic mandate in our locality, we know that our representation is normally taken into account. The mayor represents a massive constituency and has a massive mandate, so his or her opinion will be seriously considered by the relevant authorities.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 473 to 481 agreed to.

Clause 301

THE MAYOR'S CULTURE STRATEGY

Lords amendment: No. 482, in page 158, line 39, at end insert—

("( ) archives;")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

We now come to part X of the Bill, which deals with culture. The purpose of the amendment is to make specific reference to archives in the list of topics that may be included in the draft culture strategy. I would emphasise that the list of topics is purely exemplary and that the addition has no legal significance.

Nevertheless, the Government regard archives as an important part of the cultural life of the nation and wish to raise the profile of the sector. Archives are one of the strategic responsibilities of the new Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. London, in particular, is the home of many unique and important archive collections, which play a vital role in defining the city's cultural identity.

9.15 pm

In Committee, the matter was raised by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), who made an eloquent plea for the inclusion of the specific reference to archives. I am glad that we are able to respond now. Let me also take this opportunity to apologise to the right hon. Gentleman for inadvertently suggesting in an earlier debate that something was included in a White Paper when it was not. I was incorrect; I apologise unreservedly to the right hon. Gentleman, and once again acknowledge his mastery of the detail of this legislation, which ensured that his original comment was entirely accurate.

It is because of the right hon. Gentleman's intervention that—having taken into account his views and those of others put to us in Committee and elsewhere, and in another place—the Government decided to accept the amendment tabled by the Opposition. The effect will be to insert "archives" on a new line, as a separate sub-heading, under "library services".

Mr. Brooke: I thank the Minister for his gracious words.

This was always the shortest of all the amendments tabled to the Bill during its progress. Although—partly owing to provocation by the Minister—I spoke at some length when the subject was last debated, I shall be brief on this occasion. The amendment was rejected in Committee here, and in Committee in the Lords. I am delighted that, thanks to the eloquence of my noble Friend Lord Teviot, it was accepted on Report in the Lords, and I am delighted that it is in the Bill now.

I have two reasons for being pleased about that. First, towards the end of my over-long speech, I invoked the spirit of my old friend the late Raphael Samuel. He was a tremendous oral historian: every shelf of his library in Spitalfields was three-deep in books. I think that, in another place—in a really different place, I mean—he may be smiling about what we have achieved today.

Secondly, shortly after the Committee stage, I accepted a request to review Mr. Stephen Inwood's book, "A History of London"—I did not realise that it contained 1,111 pages. In any event, my review closed with the coda that it would be a worthy tribute to Mr. Inwood's book if the Government could be persuaded to incorporate in the Bill the amendments relating to archives. I do not know what Mr. Inwood's views are, but I personally am very pleased.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 483 agreed to.

Clause 302

GRANTS BY THE MAYOR FOR MUSEUMS, GALLERIES ETC.

Lords amendment: No. 484, in page 159, line 18, leave out ("pay grants") and insert

("provide financial or other assistance")

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 485 to 488.

Mr. Raynsford: The overall effect of the amendments is to ensure that the mayor may give both financial and non-financial assistance—subject to conditions—to cultural institutions and tourism in London. The Government consider that that provision improves the Bill. It gives the mayor full discretion to choose in what form to make assistance available, and with what limitations.

Again, I express my gratitude to the Opposition, who first suggested extending the power in respect of cultural institutions, and whose amendments had been accepted, in spirit, by Third Reading.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 485 to 488 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 489, after clause 304, to insert the following new clause—*Delegation of Authority's functions*—

" .—(1) Any function exercisable on behalf of the Authority by the Mayor under or by virtue of this Part shall also be exercisable on behalf of the Authority by any of the bodies or persons specified in subsection (2) below, if or to the extent that the Mayor so authorises, whether generally or specially, and subject to any conditions imposed by the Mayor.

(2) Those bodies and persons are—

(a) the Deputy Mayor;

(b) any member of staff of the Authority;

(c) the Cultural Strategy Group for London;

(d) the London Development Agency;

(e) the Common Council;

(f) any local authority.

(3) In the case of the Common Council or a local authority, an authorisation under this section—

(a) may only be granted or varied with its written consent; and

(b) shall cease to have effect if notice of the withdrawal of that consent is given to the Mayor.

(4) Where, by virtue of an authorisation under subsection (1) above, a duty is exercisable by any of the bodies or persons specified in subsection (2) above, that body or person shall discharge the duty in accordance with the authorisation and any conditions imposed by the Mayor under subsection (1) above.

(5) Subsection (4) above is without prejudice to the exercise by the body or person concerned of any power to arrange for the discharge of functions by—

(a) a committee or sub-committee, or a member, officer or employee, of the body or person, or

(b) a joint committee on which the person or body is represented,

except to the extent that the terms of the authorisation or any conditions imposed by the Mayor under subsection (1) above otherwise provide.

(6) Subsection (1) above does not apply—

(a) in relation to functions under this section; or

(b) in relation to any function of making byelaws under section (*Byelaws*)(1) below.

(7) An authorisation under subsection (1) above which relates to—

(a) any function under section 301 above; or

(b) the exercise of any function under or by virtue of section (*Trafalgar Square*)(1) or (*Parliament Square*)(3) below to the extent that it involves a determination as to whether to permit a public demonstration to take place in Trafalgar Square or Parliament Square Garden;

may only be given to the Deputy Mayor or a member of staff of the Authority.

(8) An authorisation under subsection (1) above which relates to any function of enforcing any byelaws made under section (*Byelaws*)(1) below may only be given—

(a) to the Deputy Mayor,

(b) to any member of staff of the Authority,

(c) to the Common Council,

(d) to any local authority.

(9) Each of the following bodies, namely—

(a) the Cultural Strategy Group for London,

(b) the London Development Agency,

(c) the Common Council,

(d) any local authority,

shall have power to exercise functions on behalf of the Authority in accordance with this section, whether or not they would have power to do so apart from this subsection and irrespective of the nature of the function.

(10) Subsections (3) and (4) of section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 (delegation of functions to committees, officers etc, and continued exercise by local authority concerned) shall apply in relation to any authorisation under subsection (1) above given by the Mayor—

(a) to a local authority,

(b) to the Cultural Strategy Group for London, or

(c) to the London Development Agency,

as they apply to arrangements under that section between one local authority and another.

(11) An authorisation under this section may be varied or revoked at any time by the Mayor.

(12) Any authorisation under this section, and any variation or revocation of such an authorisation, must be in writing.

(13) In this section—

"Trafalgar Square" has the same meaning as in the Trafalgar Square Act 1844;

"Parliament Square Garden" means the central garden of Parliament Square, within the meaning of section (*Parliament Square*) below."

Mr. Raynsford: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 490 to 495 and 820.

Mr. Raynsford: We have been coming closer to home with the amendments. We now reach Trafalgar square and Parliament square, which are the subject of the amendments. We are considering the amendments

together because, although they involve two distinct topics—delegation and the transfer of management responsibilities for Trafalgar and Parliament squares—they are closely related. The amendments cover the transfer from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to the GLA of day-to-day responsibility for Trafalgar square and Parliament square. Both squares will remain Crown land.

The mayor will be responsible for the repair and maintenance of the fabric of the squares, including cleaning and lighting, and for regulating their use, with functions such as giving permission for rallies and events in Trafalgar square and the control of trading, which is a controversial and significant issue.

I think there will be general agreement that Trafalgar and Parliament squares are of huge importance to London—and, indeed, to the whole nation. The Government consider that the mayor should have responsibility for them and be able to take the lead in implementing the World Squares for All master-plan project.

Amendment No. 494 gives the GLA the power to make byelaws that will replace the regulations through which the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport currently manages the squares. The mayor will be the confirming authority for the byelaws, through which he or she will be able to exercise new enforcement powers, which the Secretary of State does not have, equivalent to those of Westminster city council—the neighbouring local authority—to control illegal trading in the squares. That will allow the mayor to deal effectively with the long-standing and ever-increasing nuisance caused by illegal traders in Trafalgar square, and to prevent such problems from arising in Parliament square.

The amendments will also give the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport the powers to issue guidelines to ensure the effective care, control, management and regulation of the squares. We intend to issue guidelines initially to reflect current policy for the management of Trafalgar square in particular. That approach recognises the national significance of the squares and provides scope for a policy steer without constraining the mayor's discretion to carry out his or her new responsibilities. The mayor must have regard to such guidelines, but he or she will remain the ultimate arbiter.

It is envisaged that the mayor will make contracts and arrangements with other organisations in respect of most of those functions. For example, officers of Westminster city council could undertake policing functions in the squares, specifically in relation to unlicensed traders. However, decisions on whether a particular public demonstration should take place in the squares are to be taken by the mayor, representing a democratically elected Authority, The Government believe that it is right to ensure that decisions affecting such sensitive matters cannot be delegated.

That brings me to the general powers of delegation for this part of the Bill. Amendment No. 489 largely substitutes for the general power of delegation in respect of part X. The new clause, which will follow clause 304, makes part X largely self-contained in that respect. Its effect is generally to mirror the mayor's other powers of delegation, for example to the deputy mayor and staff of the GLA and to local authorities. However, it removes the possibility of delegating cultural functions to Transport for London. Instead, it adds the essential power for the mayor to delegate to the cultural strategy group for London. That is a consequential, technical amendment.

Apart from the limitations already outlined, the mayor will not be able to delegate the making of byelaws or his or her own decisions on the culture strategy. Delegation of the policing of the squares is also restricted. There are specific provisions requiring delegation to be in writing and, in the case of delegation to a local authority, with its written consent. There are technical subsections ensuring, for example, that the delegates have the requisite powers to accept delegation and to act through committees or staff where appropriate.

Earlier, I inadvertently described the mayor as the confirming authority for the byelaws. In fact, it is the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The mayor will make the byelaws, which will be subject to approval by the Secretary of State. I hope that that clarifies the purposes of the amendments. I urge the House to agree with the Lords in them.

Mr. Brake: I wholeheartedly support the amendments. One can imagine the disappointment of the mayor if, on election, he or she found that they had no control over two of London's greatest squares. I am certain that one of the first things the mayor will want to do is to get cars out of, and to get pedestrians, bicycles and public transport into, those squares, and to turn them into squares of which we can be proud and which register internationally. The squares could be places where people could walk in relative tranquillity and safety in the middle of London's frenetic bustle. Londoners want more squares, and it will be the mayor's job to deliver them.

Mr. Brooke: I join the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) in support of the amendments. I enjoyed the Minister's reference to coming "closer to home," and there was a touch of the Monopoly board about his sequence. I can only assume that Parliament square has never appeared on the Monopoly board because it has no residential accommodation—other than that of Madam Speaker. If the procedure is as successful as the Minister was adumbrating, the sooner the mayor takes responsibility for the illegal vendors in the royal parks, the better I shall be pleased. There is nothing that the Bill can do about that, but I join the Minister in the belief that what has been done so far has been thoroughly sensible.

Mr. Raynsford: With leave of the House, Madam Speaker. I endorse the views of the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake). It is essential that we carry the improvements forward and make Trafalgar square and Parliament square accessible to pedestrians and a pleasant environment for people to enjoy. That is the objective of the world squares initiative, which we are determined to take forward—the Deputy Prime Minister has given a strong personal commitment to it.

I enjoyed the reference by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster to the Monopoly board. I hope that, as a consequence of this, neither of us will go to jail. I strongly endorse the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 490 to 511 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 512, after clause 315, to insert the following new clause—*Overseas assistance*—

.—(1) Section 1 of the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993 (power of local authorities to provide advice and assistance overseas) shall be amended as follows.

(2) After subsection (6) there shall be inserted—

"(6A) For the purposes of subsection (1) above the Greater London Authority shall be treated as having skill and experience as respects a particular matter if—

(a) the Authority does not have skill and experience as respects that matter,

(b) the London Development Agency does have such skill and experience, and

(c) the Agency provides advice and assistance as respects that matter to the Authority."

(3) In subsection (9)(a) (authorities given power to provide assistance) after "Wales," there shall be inserted "the Greater London Authority,".")

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment provides for the Greater London Authority and the London development agency to be able to provide assistance under the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993, meeting assurances given by Ministers earlier in the Bill's passage.

Similar provision is not needed for Transport for London—which already has the power to offer such assistance under paragraph 9 of schedule 9 to the Bill—or for the police or fire authorities, which are already covered by existing legislation.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 513 and 514 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 515, after clause 318, to insert the following new clause—*Appointments by the Secretary of State*—

" .—(1) Any functions under or by virtue of this Act which will become exercisable by a person or body other than the Secretary of State may, before they become so exercisable, be exercised by the Secretary of State for the purpose of appointing such persons as he considers necessary to secure that any provision made by or under this Act operates satisfactorily when it comes into force.

(2) The Secretary of State may defray any costs which are incurred in the exercise of the functions mentioned in subsection (1) above.

(3) In exercising the functions mentioned in subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State may appoint a person on such terms and conditions (including conditions as to remuneration) as the Secretary of State thinks fit.

(4) Any such terms and conditions may include provision to the effect that the person concerned—

(a) is, or is not, to be or become a member of a particular pension scheme, or

(b) is, or is not, to be treated as employed in the civil service of the State."

Mr. Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Lords amendment No. 515 is required to make it clear that the Secretary of State has power to appoint such persons as he considers necessary to ensure that provisions by or under the Act operate satisfactorily when they come into force. Such persons may be appointed on terms and conditions that differ from standard civil service ones. It might be helpful if I gave some examples of when the Government intend that that power should be used.

9.30 pm

The first example concerns the London Ecology Unit, the London Planning Advisory Committee and the London Research Centre—each of which will be abolished on 1 April 2000. The staff of the three bodies will transfer to the GLA on its establishment, on 8 May 2000. Between 1 April and 8 May, the intention is, first, that they will be employed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Staff will retain their existing terms and conditions and pension arrangements throughout that period.

Our intention is, secondly, that some of the people who will eventually work for the GLA and functional bodies should be recruited in advance of their establishment to do the necessary groundwork, so that the bodies will be able to operate effectively from the outset. The intention is that the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions or the Home Secretary, as appropriate, should act as the employer of those people prior to their transfer to the GLA, or to the relevant functional body once it has been established. Therefore, in the case of the GLA itself, for example, the newly recruited people would transfer from the Secretary of State's employ to that of the GLA on 8 May 2000.

The likelihood is that the first of those people will need to have been recruited before the end of this year—well in advance of the Secretary of State becoming the employer of the staff of the LEU, LPAC and LRC. We think that clear statutory authority is desirable, to ensure that Ministers have the necessary powers to make such appointments.

I should make it clear that any appointments to the most senior posts in the new bodies will be made on a temporary basis, and that some posts will be left vacant, to allow the GLA and the relevant responsible bodies to decide for themselves in due course the most appropriate arrangements. The power of the Secretary of State to make appointments to each body will cease once the relevant functions become exercisable by that body. Thereafter, it will be for the bodies themselves to make appointments.

Mr. Woodward: I am sorry to have to bring to an abrupt end the rather convivial atmosphere that has developed in the House in the past hour—nevertheless, with great regret, it must end.

Lords amendment No. 515 will soon be know as the Brent, East amendment, as it is the preparatory work that the Government feel is necessary should the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) manage, despite the work of various campaign managers, to secure the Labour party nomination for London mayor.

The new clause is breathtaking, both for the power that it would give to the Secretary of State and for its casual inclusion at such a late stage in the Bill's passage—but we have become rather accustomed to the Government's late inclusion of such provisions.

In another place, Baroness Miller—whose work on the Bill, throughout its passage, has been tireless—said that to present

"this type of amendment at Third Reading is beyond belief."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 November 1999; Vol. 606, c. 675.]

She admitted to being appalled that the new clause should have been considered by the other place at such a late stage in the Bill's progress, and Opposition Members share her view.

Is the amendment not yet another example of the truly dreadful standards practised in the Bill's construction? Is it not another example of the Bill's rather shoddy construction? Is not the Bill effectively being re-written through 818 Government amendments, most of which we shall have no possibility to consider today because of the Government's timetable motion?

How can the Minister say with any dignity that the provisions of Lords amendment No. 515 had not been thought of before? Did the Government finally realise that the amendment was necessary, or did its introduction have more to do with the fact that the campaign manager realised that his candidate might not win and that the candidate from Brent, East might secure the nomination?

Ministers have said that the powers in the amendment would be for only temporary use. If it were a matter simply of the Minister's charm, I am sure that we might wish to believe him. However, the amendment does not say when the contracts might come to an end. Indeed, the amendment gives no point of termination for the arrangements that the Minister would like us to believe will be short-term and temporary. The new clause will allow the Secretary of State to make all the appointments that the mayor and Assembly should make when they take office. Why can that not be left to the mayor? If it is so important that the appointments be made earlier, it takes the biscuit for the Minister to say with an honest face that he and his officials could not have thought about it before.

Lords amendment No. 515 says:

"the Secretary of State may appoint a person on such terms and conditions'. . . as the Secretary of State thinks fit."

That creates carte blanche for the Secretary of State to hire whomever he chooses, under any contractual conditions for any period. Nowhere in the amendment is there anything to the contrary.

The arrangement relies on trust alone, yet unfortunately, during our discussion of the Bill, we have repeatedly had grounds not to trust the Government on such matters. Where is the guarantee that the amendment will not be used to put placemen into Transport for London, the London development agency or the cultural strategy group before the mayor takes over?

If people are hired on contract, will it not be expensive to get rid of them if the mayor decides that he does not want them? Who will pay? The London council tax payer will pay the cost of the Secretary of State's folly. How many posts does the right hon. Gentleman have it in mind to fill in that way? The Minister gave some examples, for which we are grateful, but perhaps he could give us guarantees of some of the appointments that will not be made under the amendment.

We will divide the House on the Lords amendment because we do not believe in it in any shape or form, and we do not believe that it is in the democratic interests of the Assembly or the city itself. Putting placemen from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions into the Authority is not a good idea. It will corrupt a body that we would like to see stand up for London.

Mr. McDonnell: I shall quickly move on from that bluster and make a serious point concerning the transfer of staff. Both as an elected local councillor and as a local government officer, I have now experienced six reorganisations at the strategic and local levels, so I ask the Minister to reassure us that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply to most staff who are transferred from existing bodies to a new body to serve the same function.

Most of the senior staff are now on fixed-term appointments, so if senior staff are to be appointed as the Lords amendment suggests, fixed-term contracts will apply. The question is therefore: what is the definition of "temporary"? How long does the Minister envisage that the fixed-term appointments will last?

Mr. Hill: The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) worked himself into a bit of a lather on this one. I suppose that, having planted the story that we read in the *Sunday Express* yesterday, he felt obliged to bring it, with such energy as he could summon—which was not a great deal—to the Chamber. There was a slight piece in that newspaper at the weekend, but it was none the less clotted nonsense for being slight.

There is nothing in the charge that the staff being recruited and appointed to the back-up team at the GLA are anything other than essential staff, such as security, clerical, administrative and IT staff who are vital if we are to achieve an effective transition when the mayor and the Assembly take over. They will take over in Romney house where the transition team is already in place and is recruiting the staff I have just mentioned. We expect that it will recruit 200 out of a potential 250 staff for the GLA, to be in place by the time that the mayor and Assembly take over.

The key point is that all the key heads of departments and senior figures in the GLA administration—and, without qualification, all those who will be deemed to play any kind of political advisory role within the mayoralty and the Assembly—will be left for the mayor and Assembly to appoint. They will not be appointed by the transition team, much less—as the ludicrous piece in the *Sunday Express* suggested—by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

As a clear indication of our total transparency and usual honesty, the whole question of the appointment of senior personnel for the GLA is, as is usual with this Government, the subject of a current consultation. We are seeking the advice of all the relevant players on the London scene, so that we can get it right. Getting it right means doing the best for London and Londoners, and not playing petty party political games, such as I fear the hon. Member for Witney—unusually—is playing this evening.

Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 346, Noes 138.

Division No. 300] **[9.42 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter

Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in amendments Nos. 516 to 521.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

The House divided: Ayes 349, Noes 139.

Division No. 301] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*

Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments agreed to.

It being after Ten o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to the Order this day.*

Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the remaining Lords amendments:—

The House divided: Ayes 349, Noes 136.

Division No. 302] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry

George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Hesley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oliner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments numbered 1 and 6; Mr. Jim Dowd, Mr. Phil Hope, Mrs. Jacqui Lait, Mr. Nick Raynsford and Mr. Shaun Woodward to be members of the Committee; Mr. Nick Raynsford to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee; Committee to withdraw immediately.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 158.

Division No. 303] **[10.27 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David

McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
[illegible] Neil *(Wigan)*
[illegible], Derek *(Halton)*
[illegible]gg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve

Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Adrian Sanders.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): We now come to motion No. 3, which I intend to put together with the Questions on the other motions on the Order Paper. [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] In that case, we shall take them separately.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TAXES

That the draft Tax Credit (New Category of Child Care Provider) Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 19th October, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 342, Noes 59.

Division No. 304] **[10.39 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*

Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Leigh, Edward
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Shepherd, Richard
Spicer, Sir Michael
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft Working Time Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 19th October, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 331, Noes 48.

Division No. 305] **[10.52 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross

Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Leigh, Edward
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael

Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Robertson, Laurence
Ruffley, David
Shepherd, Richard
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Licensing and Registered Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 19th October, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 33.

Division No. 306] **[11.3 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie

Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Arness, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Leigh, Edward
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Paterson, Owen
Randall, John
Shepherd, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Viggers, Peter
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Gray and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LEGAL SERVICES

That the draft Chartered Institute of Patent Agents Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 25th October, be approved—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 27.

Division No. 307] **[11.17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David

Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Leigh, Edward
Loughton, Tim
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Paterson, Owen
Robertson, Laurence
Shepherd, Richard
Spicer, Sir Michael
Swayne, Desmond
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Townend, John
Viggers, Peter
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Gray and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Food Standards Bill (Supplemental Allocation of Time)

Ordered,

That the Order of the House of 22nd July 1999 be supplemented as follows:

Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion one and a half hours after the commencement of the proceedings on this Order.

2.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1.

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question already proposed from the Chair.

(3) If that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment the Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any further amendment of the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees to the Lords Amendment or (as the case may be) to the Lords Amendment as amended.

(4) The Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees to the Lords Amendment or (as the case may be) to the Lords Amendment as amended;

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees to a Lords Amendment.

(6) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees to all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(7) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed to a Lords Amendment the Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any amendment which is moved by a Minister of the Crown and relevant to the Lords Amendment.

Subsequent stages

3.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

(2). The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(3). For the purpose of bringing these proceedings to a conclusion the Speaker shall put forthwith—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair and the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on or relevant to any of the remaining items in the Lords Message; and

(c) the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Miscellaneous

4.—(1) This paragraph applies to proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments and proceedings on any further Message from the Lords.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings to which this paragraph applies.

(3) Proceedings to which this paragraph applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(4) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings to which this paragraph applies shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(5) Where proceedings on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House would, by virtue of Standing Order No. 24 (Urgent matters), commence at a time when proceedings to which this paragraph applies are in progress, the proceedings on the Motion shall be postponed to the conclusion of the proceedings to which this paragraph applies.

(6) If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the expiry of the period at the end of which proceedings to which this paragraph applies are to be brought to a conclusion, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.—[*Mr. Clelland.*]

Food Standards Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 10

POWER TO CARRY OUT OBSERVATIONS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 4, line 32, after ("activities") insert—

("(ba) premises, businesses or operations involved in fish farming;")

11.30 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Ms Joyce Quin): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 5 and 7.

Ms Quin: This group of amendments makes some minor clarifications to the scope of the power to carry out observations in clauses 10 and 11. It includes some important additional safeguards on the powers of entry in both clauses 11 and 14, which the Government agreed in response to concerns raised in the other place.

As to amendments Nos. 1, 2, 4 and 5, at earlier stages in the House we debated the agency's need to gather representative information on food safety and related matters, subject to the limitations in the Bill and the agency's general duty to act proportionately. The amendments ensure that there are no technical gaps in the powers to carry out observations.

The amendments include a reference to fish farms alongside the existing references to food, agricultural and animal feed businesses and premises. Although it was always intended that fish farms should be covered—because, as hon. Members know, shellfish can be a high-risk product—it was necessary to put the issue beyond doubt. The amendments also clarify the fact that the samples that may be taken during observations include samples from food sources, live animals and plants. The existing text was intended to cover this, but the amendment removes any doubt.

As to amendments Nos. 3 and 7, we have always emphasised that the Bill's powers must be used reasonably and proportionately, with proper regard paid to the needs of businesses. The Bill has safeguards that provide for this, some of which were added following debate in Committee. We also gave assurances that the agency's officers would follow guidance to ensure that they behaved reasonably and followed the principles of better regulation.

Therefore, the Government were happy to accept two additional amendments from the Earl of Radnor relating to the authorisations to exercise powers of entry to undertake observations or enforcement monitoring. They provide that authorisations given to use the powers of entry may include a requirement to follow particular conditions—for example, ensuring that the necessary hygiene precautions are taken, including wearing appropriate protective clothing.

The Government have given a commitment that authorisations will, in practice, require the authorised officer to follow conditions equivalent to those already applicable to enforcement officers under code of practice 9, made under section 40 of the Food Safety Act 1990. That required officers to observe any reasonable food safety precautions that are required by the company or organisation under inspection.

The amendments strengthen the Bill's existing safeguards, and I hope that the House will welcome them.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I am grateful to the Minister for her explanation of the amendments. We welcome clarification of food sources and samples and the further moves in the Bill to emphasise hygiene precautions. We support that sensible measure.

However, I want to make a point about fish farming, relating not only to the fundamental question whether fish farming should be included in the Bill but to the concern expressed in another place that the Bill now refers simply to "fish farming", rather than "commercial fish farming". There are, of course, fish farms that produce fish for ornamental and amenity purposes, and not normally for food. When that concern was expressed in the other place, Baroness Hayman said that, because the Bill related to food safety, the measure obviously related only to commercial fish farms. However, having reflected on that, I hope that the Minister will give the matter a little more thought.

There is no definition of the word "food" in the Bill, because it takes the definition used in the Food Safety Act 1990. The Government have resisted further definition, but for most people food is a matter of individual perception. Although we may not want to eat certain types of fish, people in other parts of the world do. It worries me that the amendment covers any fish farm, when it could be shown that some fish species were being used for food by a particular culture—we are a multicultural society these days.

I accept that it is not the Government's intention to include within the Bill all types of fish farm, but I am concerned that the Bill does not include the description "commercial" or "fish for food" to narrow its scope to those fish farms that produce fish for human consumption.

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): We welcome the amendments and the inclusion of fish farms. I understand the concern of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), but I do not know of many sects or religions that might eat koi carp. On the other hand, I do know of people who catch trout that may well have been fish-farmed earlier in their existence. It makes sense to include fish farms in the Bill.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I have a small concern about the amendment. Although I welcome the addition of fish farming to the Bill, the definition goes too far and may potentially include fish that are too young.

I understand that there are specialist breeding centres where the fish are spawned and, as small fry, are transported in tanks in their millions to the fish farms or breeding grounds. At that stage, the fish may be given foodstuffs, or canthazaxin or other chemicals. They are

weighed as they begin to put on flesh and therefore become more suitable for human consumption. Of course, it is vital that they and their foodstuffs are monitored and checked, but I am not sure what would be the benefit to the Government or the Food Standards Agency of including the very earliest stages of the fish-breeding process.

That is my simple point. It is not a strong point of principle. Rather, I am not sure of the merit of including those stages in the Bill. I would be happy if the Minister could explain the logic behind that part of the definition, which, in my reading of amendment No. 2, includes those early stages of fish breeding and rearing.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I shall briefly draw the attention of the House to amendment No. 7, and the biggest problem facing many abattoirs, which is the poor quality of the staff, many of whom have come from Spain and do not speak English very well. In an abattoir in my area, a young Spanish fellow attended the dressing of a carcase, and believing that it was that of a bullock, said that the spine should be taken out. The carcase was that of a pig. Such ignorance among many young vets who come in to make up numbers, simply because the word "vétérinaire" has been mistranslated by officials, is causing grievous problems in many abattoirs.

I receive numerous letters from abattoirs on the subject. One letter states that a study has shown that the largest single cause of meat contamination was the inspection process in the slaughterhouse. In another abattoir, the strictest enforcers of hygiene standards are the customers—the men from the supermarkets—which is as it should be. They found that the inspectors in that abattoir were not wearing clean overalls, were going from one designated zone to another and were using contaminated tools.

I welcome amendment No. 7, as it is essential that vets understand the basic principles of hygiene. I regret that some of those in abattoirs do not.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I welcome the inclusion of fish farming. For us in Scotland, fish farming by and large means salmon farming. It is an important industry employing thousands of people in rural communities, but the licensing of such farms has caused considerable consternation among our pelagic, demersal and shellfish fishing communities. It is therefore important that the quality standards that exist in the fish—generally salmon—farms are maintained at a high level, and it is right that there should be inspection of those farms.

Ms Quin: Most of the comments on this group of amendments relate to the amendment on fish farms. I thought I heard one of my colleagues unkindly suggest that some of the comments amounted to red herrings.

Fish farming is important, as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) rightly pointed out, because of the number of fish farms and the employment that they provide for increasing numbers of people.

My understanding is that ornamental fish farms would not be covered by the provision, because the powers of entry can be used only to carry out the agency's responsibilities—that is, for food safety and other consumer interests in relation to food.

I recognise that the inclusion of fish farms has been welcomed. It makes sense that that should be specifically stated in the Bill, as hon. Members have pointed out.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) referred to amendment No.7. I am pleased that he welcomed the amendment, although some of his comments were curious. The people who have powers of entry must respect conditions of hygiene. It is an important issue, but some of the fears that the hon. Gentleman expressed should be covered by other parts of the Bill dealing with the agency's responsibility for training and standards of staff working in such establishments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 5 agreed to.

Clause 12

MONITORING OF ENFORCEMENT ACTION

Lords amendment: No. 6, in page 6, line 13, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

("(3) Each annual report of the Agency shall contain a report on its activities during the year in enforcing any relevant legislation for which it is the enforcement authority and its performance in respect of—

(a) any standards under subsection (2) that apply to those activities ; and

(b) any objectives relating to those activities that are specified in the statement of objectives and practices under section 22.")

Ms Quin: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 15.

Ms Quin: The Government accepted these two amendments, which were tabled by Cross-Bench and Opposition peers. Lords amendment No. 6 relates to the requirement on the agency to report in its annual report on its own performance as an enforcement authority. That relates primarily to the performance of the Meat Hygiene Service, which was extensively debated in the House and by the Special Select Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron).

11.45 pm

The Government have made it clear throughout that they believe that it is right that the MHS, which is responsible for enforcement in a key area of food safety, should be part of the agency, but we also made it clear that we believe that it should be subject to rigorous audit of its performance—that point was made strongly by my predecessor—and that its officers should behave reasonably, in accordance with the principles of better regulation.

Amendment No. 6 will put in the Bill the clear requirement that the agency should include in its report to Parliament information on its activities where it acts as an enforcement authority in relation to specific standards which will be set for its performance, and in relation to specific objectives and practices included in the agency's statement of objectives and practices, which, as hon. Members know, is required by clause 22. We have made

[Ms Quin]

it clear that those objectives will include compliance with the better regulation principles. We believe that that will contribute to greater openness about the performance of the MHS, which has been of concern to Members on both sides of the House. I therefore hope that the House will agree that the amendment is helpful and will improve the Bill.

In a similar vein, amendment No. 15 requires that the agency's agreed statement of objectives and practices be laid before Parliament and the devolved legislatures. That will make a helpful contribution to openness. We expect the agency to consult interested bodies on its statement before it is finalised. I stress that the amendment was tabled by the Opposition—by Baroness Byford—and the Government believe that it will improve the Bill.

Mr. Paice: The right hon. Lady is right: the amendment represents an improvement to the Bill—obviously we support it, because it was tabled by my noble Friend—but I must tell her that the improvement is tiny. It goes nowhere towards addressing the real concerns expressed by Conservative Members throughout the earlier stages of the Bill's consideration about the MHS and the dual role of enforcement and monitoring authority that the Food Standards Agency will play. It does not tell us how the two roles will be separated in practice—nor have the Government produced any convincing reason for their rejection of the advice of the Special Select Committee chaired by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), to which the Minister referred.

We also need to question MHS charges. At present, as I understand it, the Minister has to approve all charges—at least her predecessor regularly told the House that he had not yet approved any rises, so we assume that he had the power to do so if he needed to. If the MHS is to go into the FSA, what controls will there be on charging? If the annual report is published in the way described in the amendment, will it include, for example, separate MHS accounts and a schedule of charges and how they have been arrived at so that people can see transparently what is going on?

Given that a slaughterhouse is closing every week under this Government, it is time that we had much more transparency in respect of the charges made for meat hygiene inspection. The House will be aware that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food himself has announced studies of comparative costs and charges in abattoirs in other countries. If that matter is to be dealt with by the MHS, is the right hon. Gentleman wasting his time? Will he have any powers to do anything, even if he uncovers evidence showing, as we believe, that British abattoirs are being treated unfairly? If not, and if the Meat Hygiene Service is to have total control over its charging mechanisms, it is essential that it be transparent and that the report for which amendment No. 6 provides covers all those possibilities. We may then be able to put an end to the constant arguments about the level of charges. Under this Government, however, I do not see that happening.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) and the Minister both talked about the need for transparency. The Meat Hygiene Service and the Food Standards Agency will deal with some of the most sensitive issues relating to the food chain.

The Minister said that the report would be published and laid before Parliament. She knows, however, that a great number of statutorily required reports are laid before Parliament, but that no effort is made to debate their content. Given the importance of the issues mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire and the importance of the work of the Food Standards Agency and the Meat Hygiene Service, will the Minister assure us that the report will not just be laid before Parliament, but tabled for a proper debate in Government time so that we can examine many of the sensitive issues that my hon. Friend outlined?

Dr. Brand: Hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome the creation of the Food Standards Agency, because we all see the need to restore confidence in British food. To achieve that, it is essential that we have openness and transparency. That is why I welcome the amendments.

The annual report should not just look back at the events of the previous year, but should look forward and give us a business plan and a budget for the following year. One of our concerns is that the Meat Hygiene Service could take over all the energies and resources of the Food Standards Agency and, so, defeat the very purpose for which the agency was set up. Will the Minister assure us that the report relating to the Meat Hygiene Service will show clearly the resources that the service will use, so that we can see that the other arm of the agency is protected?

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am beginning to wonder whether the amendment is totally fatuous. The more I listen to the words of praise echoing around the Chamber about it, the more it occurs to me that it will be utterly useless. The clue to my suspicion came from the Minister, who said that it would contribute to openness. That immediately makes me suspicious, as it is completely meaningless. Matters became even worse when the right hon. Lady said that she expected the agency to consult. There seems to be no obligation on the agency to consult in this part of the process; it is simply a ministerial expectation. That is not good enough.

As if that were not bad enough, the amendment will oblige a copy of the statement approved by the agency to be laid

"before Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly"—

"laid before", no more. One can only conclude that there will be a process, possibly of consultation—we do not know; the Minister hopes so, but nothing obliges it—and the agency will reach its own conclusions about its objectives. There will be no outside check on that process. Then, in a grand gesture of openness, the agency will lay its conclusions before Parliaments and Assemblies.

Following the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), there the process ends. A report, about which no consultation was needed, is laid before Parliament. We all know that that could well be a completely meaningless part of the process.

In my more negative moments—there are few, I admit, but every now and again, during debates such as this, a bit of negativity arises—I ask myself what all this means, and where it is leading us. Will it advance the process in any way? Here is yet another piece of paper—another

document. No doubt it will be available in the Vote Office; no doubt Members will be able to apprise themselves of its contents. But will the process go any further? If my right hon. Friend's proposal is not taken up, and if the Minister cannot give us an absolute undertaking that something will complete the process, it will have no meaning.

Why are we all gathered here, praising the amendment—which originated in another place—when, on the face of it, it has no meaning whatever? It constitutes yet another layer of bureaucracy: yet another part of the process, which will add nothing to the ensuring of food safety—or, I think, to the role that the House likes to think it takes upon itself in scrutinising the Government and holding them accountable. There is no provision for scrutiny, or for holding to the Government to account.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I do not know why my right hon. Friend is worried. Like all the other annual reports produced by quangos, this report will be sent to my right hon. Friend as a matter of course, because he is a Member of Parliament. He will pass it quickly across his desk into the nearest wastepaper bin, where it will remain unread by numerous Members of Parliament. What is the point?

Mr. Forth: May I make a plea, following my hon. Friend's remarks? I do not wish to receive a copy of the document; I should be very distressed if I did. *[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) has the gall to suggest that it might be sent by e-mail. I do not know what that is, and I do not know whether I would receive any of it either. What I do not want is for my time to be wasted by my being sent a copy of a document that has so little meaning. If it stops at the Vote Office, at least I will have discretion in regard to whether I wish to peruse it. That would be something.

My plea is this: unless the Minister can reassure us that the amendment will have greater meaning than I have suggested, I think we should reject it. It will provide for an additional layer of bureaucracy and an additional unnecessary procedure that will do nothing to reassure the public about the safety of our food.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): The Minister described the amendment as an improvement. I am not sure that it is an improvement; I see little substantial difference between the original subsection (3) and the present subsection (3). Indeed, the key word "performance" in the old subsection is left out of the new subsection.

What really concerns me, however, is the Minister's attempt to defend the amendment on the ground that it strengthens the audit of the Meat Hygiene Service. I think that she used the words "as a regulatory practice". In my view, the real difficulty lies in the fact that we are allowing one regulatory authority to approve the regulatory performance of another. In other words, the audit will not be independent. Feed regulators will be assessing the performance of a food regulation agency, namely the Meat Hygiene Service, and I do not think that that is satisfactory.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I do not think that the amendment goes far enough. I would have liked to see some kind of independent audit of the performance of the Meat Hygiene Service, not least because it is the key service in relation to charging. When, some years ago, I visited the headquarters of the service in York, I was struck by its complete independence in regard to fees. It was for the Minister to decide in the end, but it was entirely for the MHS to propose.

The amendment does nothing to protect the service's clients against the increases in charges which we have seen in recent years, and could go on seeing. Surely we need a much more independent audit to establish whether the MHS is providing good value for money, and the good regulation that the Minister and the House want.

12 midnight

Mr. Paterson: The Meat Hygiene Service reminds me of a tax farm under the Bourbons. It has a free remit to extend its area of operation and the more it extends that area of operation, the more money it can raise.

I have a copy of its report for last year. It is beautifully printed and expensively produced—and glib. It has a list of targets and—surprise, surprise—a list of results. Each one has the stamp "Achieved". Further on there is a glossy photograph of an employee called John, who has worked for the Meat Hygiene Service since its inception. He says:

"The Meat Hygiene Service training courses and videos have enabled me to perform my enforcement duties with confidence. This, combined with good working relations at the plants I visit has enabled to maintain high standards of hygiene and strict compliance with legislation."

That is entirely different from the world portrayed in letters that people have sent me. One letter from an abattoir says that its charges have increased from £300 per year to £17,000 per year. That means inspection fees of £180 per tonne. The letter says:

"Were we a large, full-throughput plant, the comparative cost would be around £1 per tonne."

Another letter says:

"we are charged almost £40 for these people and they know as much about a turkey as I know about a llama, it makes you want to 'spit', especially when you are aware that the government are seemingly hell bent on increasing these charges, some by as much as a staggering 80 per cent.

We had at our site one particular Iberian who found out after almost two months that the turkeys we exclusively process weren't the chickens he thought they were, and there are many more equally ludicrous examples."

The report serves no purpose. It is purely a publicity pamphlet for the quango. We need an independently audited report, properly debated in Parliament. I should also like a statement on the appeal mechanisms. We hear that in informal discussions with the industry the Government are coming round to the idea of having an appeal mechanism. As we said in Committee, it is not good enough to have the Food Standards Agency in charge of the Meat Hygiene Service. The gamekeeper cannot also act as the poacher. What is the audit mechanism to ensure an independent report? What appeal mechanism is there to allow crushed, benighted little firms to avoid being put out of business by the quango? The number of abattoirs has gone down in the past couple of

[Mr. Paterson]

years from 4,000 to 350. That has happened partly because of the quango.

Ms Quin: I am somewhat surprised by the content of some of the speeches that I have just heard, because the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), speaking for the Official Opposition, said rather grudgingly that this was a small amendment. Other Opposition Members have described it as fatuous—I think that that was the expression used by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—or meaningless. That is surprising, because the amendment was moved eloquently by Baroness Byford in the other place. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst seems to think it extraordinary that he should be expected to support an amendment put forward by his party. I find it surprising that he does not support it.

Many of the questions that hon. Members have raised were answered by the former Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), in the debate on 22 July. However, given some of the questions that have been raised, it is important to repeat some of the points that he made. He spelled out the separation of roles for the audit of the Meat Hygiene Service. That will be achieved in a number of ways. The veterinary public health unit, which audits the Meat Hygiene Service, will be separated within the Food Standards Agency. There will also be a separate supervisory committee. There are also audits by the European Commission and the state veterinary service, as well as the financial audit by the National Audit Office. I am rather surprised that Opposition Members did not refer to these.

On controls on charging, charges will still be set ultimately by Ministers, as now. Any changes to the charges will be subject to consultation, as now.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Could my hon. Friend assure me that where the private sector is employed by the Meat Hygiene Service, that also will be subject to audit and account?

Ms Quin: As far as I know, it should be. However, the best thing would be for me to write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library, so that he knows the exact position.

On charging, I must stress that the Meat Hygiene Service will continue to produce its own separate accounts—a point raised by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand).

Of course the House will be able to debate the annual report—and any of the reports contained within that—if it wishes. Owing to the interest across the House in the work of the Meat Hygiene Service, it is obvious that Members will use existing methods to raise concerns and to make sure that the issues presented to them in annual reports can be debated fully.

The Meat Hygiene Service will have to produce its own accounts, and account for the way in which it has used its resources. The agency will consult on its clause 22 statement. These measures all provide excellent opportunities to deal with the points raised by hon. Members.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 7 agreed to.

Clause 14

POWER OF ENTRY FOR MONITORING ENFORCEMENT ACTION.

Lords amendment: No. 8, in page 8, line 2, leave out from ("1991") to ("a") in line 3 and insert

("(in this Act referred to as "the 1991 Order") or orders or regulations made under it is (by virtue of Article 26(1A), (1B), (2), (3) or (3A) of that Order)")

Ms Quin: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 9 to 11, 17, 18, 20, 24, 27, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 40, 41, 45, 47 and 48.

Ms Quin: The amendment, and the others in the group, are all technical drafting amendments which deal with Northern Ireland aspects of the Bill.

The Bill has been passing through Parliament at a time of considerable uncertainty over the future of the devolution settlement in Northern Ireland. As the agency will operate in Northern Ireland, it is important that we review the text of the Bill at the latest possible moment to ensure that the references to Northern Ireland are all correct. That is why the Government made these changes in the House of Lords, which were accepted.

One important amendment in the group is No. 35, which ensures that the powers will take proper effect—both under the existing transferred power, and afterwards, once the devolution settlement has come into force and the Northern Ireland First Minister and Deputy First Minister have taken up their powers. Most of the other amendments are minor drafting points that clarify the references to Northern Ireland legislation.

The amendments to the schedules make changes to Northern Ireland legislation to parallel proposed amendments to existing Great Britain legislation which are already contained in the schedules to the Bill. In particular, the Food Safety (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 will be amended to parallel amendments to the Food Safety Act 1990, and the Genetically Modified Organisms (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 will be amended to reflect changes to the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and to provide consistency.

Although the amendments include a lot of new text, they do nothing new in policy terms. They will simply make equivalent changes to Northern Ireland legislation. As a whole, therefore, they will ensure that, when the agency is established, there is a consistent legislative framework in place across the United Kingdom, regardless of whether the devolution settlement is fully in place.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 9 to 11 agreed to.

Clause 19

PUBLICATION ETC. BY THE AGENCY OF ADVICE AND INFORMATION

Lords amendment: No. 12, in page 9, line 33, at end insert—

("( ) The exercise of that power is subject to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.")

Ms Quin: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 13, 14, 19, 23, 26, 28, 29 and 42.

Ms Quin: This group of amendments is composed largely of minor drafting points. However, I should like to comment briefly on Lords amendments Nos. 12 and 13, which were tabled by the Opposition in another place on Report, and agreed to by the Government.

The Government made it clear that our intention was that the Data Protection Act 1998 should apply, so that in using its powers to publish under clause 19, the agency should not be able to disclose personal data. The amendments make a useful clarification of that point. The inclusion of a special reference to the 1998 Act makes it absolutely clear that the agency will be subject to the data protection principles that the Act contains, and that the agency must, therefore, maintain the personal privacy of individuals about whom it has obtained information in the course of its work.

As I said, the amendments largely concern technical drafting points. Lords amendments Nos. 14, 19, 28 and 29 do not change the Bill's substance at all. Lords amendment No. 42, however, makes it absolutely clear that the agency will be subject to the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration by adding the ombudsman to the list of bodies covered by the PCA.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 13 to 15 agreed to.

Clause 24

DIRECTIONS RELATING TO BREACH OF DUTY OR TO INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

Lords amendment: No. 16, in page 12, line 36, leave out paragraph (b) and insert—

("(b) by the Scottish Ministers (in so far as it is exercisable by them within devolved competence or by virtue of an Order in Council made under section 63 of the Scotland Act 1998); and")

Ms Quin: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 21, 22 and 31.

Ms Quin: This group of amendments includes some important technical points arising from devolution. As we have explained throughout the Bill's passage, the agency is being established as a United Kingdom body, with the aim of achieving across the United Kingdom a consistent approach to food safety. However, food safety and standards are a devolved matter. We therefore have to ensure that the Bill correctly reflects the position following the devolution legislation, and takes account of the appropriate devolved responsibilities.

Mr. Paice: The Bill must be right in addressing the devolution issue. I should simply like to challenge the Minister on Lords amendment No. 16, which would amend clause 24. Clause 24 itself refers to clause 23, and the fact that the powers would be given to Scottish Ministers if it appeared to them that

"there has been a serious failure by the Agency

. . . to comply with section 23".

Clause 23(2) itself states that

"The Agency, in considering whether or not to exercise any power, or the manner in which to exercise any power, shall take into account (among other things)—

(a) the nature and magnitude of any risks to public health".

That provision brings us immediately to the current crisis of confidence over the Government's policy on beef on the bone. If devolution does what the Bill says, if the arrangements are separate for each country and if the Lords amendment gives Scottish Ministers competence to consider whether there has been

"a serious failure by the Agency"

to take into account the nature and magnitude of those risks, what will happen after the agency is created?

Now, despite the advice that he has received from the chief medical officer, the English Minister refuses to lift that absurd ban, on the basis that his Scottish counterpart says that he does not think it safe for Scots to eat beef on the bone. That is the price of devolution.

12.15 am

It seems odd that the Bill establishes, and a Government amendment reaffirms, Scottish competence to deal with such issues and to take into account the nature and magnitude of the risks to public health, which is the very core of the beef on the bone issue, while what the Government are actually doing—or rather, failing to do, which is to lift the absurd ban—shows a total disregard of the principles in the Bill.

Dr. Godman: In relation to Lords amendment No. 16, I have every confidence in the Scottish medical officer of health—just as I have every confidence in the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament—to ensure that the Bill and the regulations are administered fairly and effectively.

However, what would happen if Ministers in the Scottish Parliament expressed concern about the way in which fish farms were inspected by the agency? A few minutes ago, I pointed out to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State how important that industry is to our coastal and island communities. What powers does the Scottish Parliament possess to change or introduce regulations governing such access to fish farms or other Scottish enterprises? We may require some sort of concordat, because Scottish Ministers and Members of the Scottish Parliament may have far greater knowledge of the local conditions surrounding such industries than do Ministers or Members here—with the obvious and estimable exception of Scottish Members of this Parliament.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I welcome the amendments in so far as they

[Mr. Alasdair Morgan]

clarify the position of the Scottish Parliament. None the less, I hark back to what I said on Second Reading—that if Scotland had been allowed to legislate for itself on food standards, neither the amendments nor the original clauses would have been necessary in the first place. The Government have embarked on devolution and the House has devolved the oversight of food standards, yet they do not seem prepared to accept the consequences and let the devolved Parliaments legislate in their own way. So be it. They have chosen this route, so I welcome the amendments.

To follow what the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) said, I do not believe that anything in the Bill specifically states that the Scottish Parliament may in due course choose to legislate separately on such matters.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Nineteen minutes past 12 in the morning is not perhaps the most felicitous time to ask this question, so I preface it by saying that the Minister may wish to reply by putting a note in the Library. A judgment on beef on the bone has been made in the sheriff court in Scotland—a judgment that is very awkward from the Government's point of view. Ministers know that that judgment opens a Pandora's box of problems, so if they cannot comment off the top of their head, will they put a note in the Library about their attitude to the sheriff court's finding?

Dr. Brand: I shall not enter into the beef on the bone debate, but I invite the Minister to clarify the mechanism that will be used. As I understand it, the Food Standards Agency will give advice to Ministers and will publish that advice. I imagine that the relevant Ministers in the relevant nations will be free to reject that advice, or to accept it. If that is the case, clearly it would be acceptable to have beef on the bone in Wales, but not in England—I am not sure what the Scots want to do.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): We should have it everywhere.

Dr. Brand: That is a personal opinion. I would welcome clarification from the Minister on my point.

Ms Quin: I have been somewhat surprised by the wide-ranging nature of the debate on what is a technical amendment. The amendment relates to Executive devolution under the Scotland Act 1998 and we cannot reopen the debate on the devolution settlement, as some of the contributions appeared to try to tempt me to do. Legislative responsibilities for food safety and standards, including beef on the bone, were already devolved by Parliament in the Scotland Act 1998. The issue of beef on the bone has been debated several times and will doubtless be raised again in various ways.

Amendment No. 16 is simply a technical amendment which will ensure that Scottish Ministers have power of direction on matters within their devolved competence, including matters that are the subject of Executive devolution, as well as directly under the Scotland Act 1998. It will make no significant difference to the powers of direction, but it is necessary for consistency within the general framework of devolution in Scotland.

I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has a felicitous sense of timing, but my understanding is that the case he mentioned is still before the courts and, therefore, I cannot comment on it even though he tempted me to do so. Whether I am relieved about that, I will keep to myself.

We have had an interesting debate, but it has ranged much wider than the technical nature of the amendment would suggest. None the less, I hope that the amendment will gain the approval of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: For all the levity, the case I mentioned is a serious issue. When the courts finally come to a judgment, MAFF will have to make a statement on it.

Ms Quin: I was not commenting on the seriousness or otherwise of the issue. I was simply saying that it is currently before the courts.

Mr. Fallon: As I understand Lords amendment No. 22, it would allow the Scottish Parliament to confer an additional function of its choosing on the Food Standards Agency, which may be exercisable in Scotland, but presumably, once conferred, may also be exercisable in England. Can the Minister explain the amendment?

Ms Quin: Lords amendment No. 22 is intended simply to remove any doubt that may arise about the competence of the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly to modify the functions of the agency in their own areas of jurisdiction, which have already been established. That does not necessarily mean that Scotland or Northern Ireland would do something different from England and Wales. However, because Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own legislative competence on food safety and standards matters, we need to ensure that there is no doubt about their ability to make changes to the agency's functions which have been agreed across the UK.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 17 to 24 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 25, in page 19, line 28, at end insert—

("(2A) In this Act the expression "interests of consumers in relation to food" includes (without prejudice to the generality of that expression) interests in relation to the labelling, marking, presenting or advertising of food, and the descriptions which may be applied to food.")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Ms Quin.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment (a).

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I shall speak to amendment (a) with confidence and with the full support of the National Farmers Union, which has written to me and my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) saying that the amendment would open the door to better country-of-origin labelling, and that that would assist consumers to buy British, on the basis of quality, origin, taste and safety.

The amendment would also encourage action better to inform consumers, through labelling and otherwise, about how the product has reached the supermarket shelf.

Farmers producing to the high welfare standards required by British law in the pig industry, for example, could then command the premium that they well deserve. We urge the Government to grab this opportunity, at this late stage of the Bill's progress through the House, to give the Food Standards Agency the power to regulate the sourcing of food in this country.

On repeated occasions during the Bill's progress, Opposition Members have tried to get the question of labelling incorporated into the FSA. It seems ironic that one of the key reasons for bringing the agency into being is to protect public health from food risks, yet failure to give the agency responsibility for food sourcing and the labelling of food will simply prevent members of the public from protecting themselves against real or perceived risks. That is why we urge the Government most strongly to consider accepting the amendment, even at this very late stage.

The fact that the co-director of the Food Commission has described present labelling arrangements as a shambles should serve to encourage the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to go further than his most recent statements about changing the guidelines on labelling. Indeed, speaking on BBC1's "Breakfast with Frost" programme on 24 October, he said:

"I do think if people check where the product is sourced from they can make informed choices."

However, people cannot do that. At the height of the Belgian dioxin scare, my nanny bought chicken breast from the local supermarket for my children's tea. From the label, there was no way of knowing where the meat had come from, so I followed the Minister's good advice of "when in doubt, throw it out".

The Minister went on, in his interview on the "Breakfast with Frost" programme, to state:

"My personal choice is to look for the Meat and Livestock Commission's 'Assured British' label".

Conservative Members wholeheartedly support that scheme, but its impact is limited. Out of curiosity, I went to my local supermarket and hunted—in vain—for British smoked back bacon. There was Dutch and Danish bacon of that variety, as well as many packs with no country of origin identified at all. To work, the Assured British scheme must be backed by statute. That is one of the strong reasons why we are looking for the incorporation of labelling into the work of the Food Standards Agency.

The weakness of the Minister's announcement of 27 October about amending the guidelines is that it does not place any legal obligation on retailers to follow the recommended good practice regarding labelling as to country of origin. Without some extra obligation, as opposed to mere advice, there must be doubt about how effective the proposed changes will be.

I hope that the Government will make the concession implied in the amendment and give the very important responsibility for the sourcing of food to the Food Standards Agency. Failure to do that will lead us to press the amendment to a vote.

12.30 am

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I support amendment (a), although, as I am no curmudgeon, I must point out that the Government have been responsive to many points made here and in the other place. They have gone a long way towards improving the Bill, but the amendment asks them to go one step further.

The amendment qualifies the definition of the interests of consumers in relation to food, a concept referred to throughout the Bill, notably in clauses 2, 6, 7 and 8. It defines the work of the agency in protecting the public from risk, developing policies, providing advice and information and obtaining, compiling and keeping under review such information. It is right that the agency should take account of the sourcing of food when considering those matters.

To persuade me that that should not be stated in the Bill, the Minister may suggest that it is unnecessary because the point is already covered. If that is so, why is amendment No. 25 felt necessary, as it, too, defines the terms within which advice should be given? Alternatively, the Minister may suggest that amendment (a) might prejudice the agency's work. I cannot accept that, as the amendment would provide an important adjunct to the agency's core work. A further suggestion might be that the amendment would not be in the interests of consumers, an idea with which I would have to differ most strongly. It is greatly in the interests of consumers that they should know the source of food. It is a happy coincidence that the interests of consumers and producers are the same in this case.

The Minister has mentioned the pig industry, but one of the major reasons for that industry's parlous state is the high welfare standards that prevail in the United Kingdom. Those standards are quite proper, but they are not matched in the pig industries of our principal competitors abroad, and our pig producers are therefore at a constant commercial disadvantage in the supermarkets if consumers cannot make a choice informed by knowledge of the source of the food and the conditions under which it was produced.

In the interests of consumers, producers and transparency, we should avoid the type of confusion on which there have been recent exchanges during Question Time. Earlier this month, I pointed out that St. Ivel Shape yoghurt—not a product that I buy regularly—is made in France while Carte D'or ice cream is made in Gloucester. How is the consumer supposed to understand that?

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. St. Ivel yoghurt is made in my constituency, at Wootton Bassett.

Mr. Heath: St. Ivel yoghurt is made in many places, and the brand to which I have referred is made in France. I am afraid the hon. Gentleman is quite mistaken. It is a tragedy that even an hon. Member who represents the area where a product is made may not be aware that it is also sourced from another country, but that fact highlights the very difficulty that the consumer faces when he or she goes to the supermarket. I sometimes do the shopping, rather than sending a nanny to do it, and I, like many people, find labelling confusing.

If the Minister cannot respond adequately to these points, I fear that we shall support amendment (a), which is important to our primary producers.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I wish to make two brief points following the convincing argument made by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). I believe in free trade, and it is terribly important that people should be told the truth.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

However, as one of the older Members in the House, I can recall other occasions on which we have discussed proposals that seemed sensible, sound and absolutely super, only to find to our horror that we could not in fact put them into practice. In such cases, we have ended up spending millions of pounds in compensation.

I remember Members waving their Order Papers over the question of which ships were allowed to fish under the British quota. We all thought it was splendid, but now it is costing us a lot of money. I have a simple question for my hon. Friends on the Front Bench and the Minister: are we allowed to do this sort of thing? Sadly, I find that in Parliament these days, there are many things that we would like to do but are not allowed to do because, if we did, we would be fined horrendous sums or put in the equivalent of a Euro-prison.

I shop in a store called Asda, of which hon. Members may have heard. I always intend to buy New Zealand lamb but, unfortunately, I am not allowed to, not because of labelling but because of National Farmers Union pressure. The NFU is so concerned about overproduction that we are not allowed to buy from New Zealand any more. That is sad because whenever we have been in trouble, our friends from New Zealand have always been there to help us.

I have a horrible feeling that our basic problem is overproduction, not labelling. There is so much food. We are producing more and more, but, sadly, people are eating less and less. I am told that the continentals eat 2 per cent. less every year. The crucial question is whether we are allowed to label continental food according to its origin.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is very pro-British and made it abundantly clear that he did not want to buy any more French food. The trouble is that, as I understand it, we are not allowed to determine whether food comes from France, so it will be hard to help him. I hope that my hon. Friends will not end up in another horrible mess where we have to pay more Euro-fines. Let us find out whether we are entitled to label food as coming from France, Germany or Italy. I understand that, under a derogation, we are allowed to say whether something comes from Britain or outside the European Economic Community, but not to give people the opportunity of knowing which part of the EEC something comes from.

My point may seem minor, but bearing in mind the horrendous fines that we have had to pay and the undermining of our freedom to decide things in this House, before we do something that we know to be sound, sensible and reasonable and that would support a freedom, let us find out whether we are allowed to do it. One of the great tragedies in this House is that we spend a great deal of time talking about things that we are not allowed to do. We have debates on fishing or the age of homosexual consent, over which we have no power at all. Let us not make another blunder. Before taking the final plunge and approving this superb amendment, which was tabled for the best of reasons, let us find out if we can do it.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I hope that the Government will accept the amendment. In a previous debate, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food highlighted the importance of having meaningful labelling of our food. That must mean a statement of its source. Labelling should state the country of origin of food. As my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said, the public need to know so that they can make informed choices between, for example, beef fed in this country on natural rations and that from cattle that we are told are fed on sewage sludge elsewhere, or between pigmeat produced in this country to high animal health and welfare standards and that produced in countries where standards are much lower.

Not only do the public need to know, they have a right to know where their food was produced. While I am sure that the Government will try to tighten the present labelling regulations, if they stop short of showing the country of origin on the product, they will not be serving the public interest properly. In the same earlier debate, the Government said that on issues of animal welfare, Parliament had listened and legislated and reflected what public opinion wanted in the legislation. That was democracy at work—the people told us what they wanted; Parliament reacted accordingly and legislation followed.

At present, because there is heightened interest in food, the British people want to know the country of origin of the food that they eat. In other words, the same conditions apply. The same people who wanted meat to be produced from animals bred under higher welfare standards now want products to be labelled with the country of origin. Unless the Government intend to suspend the rules of democracy, they should accept the amendment.

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): Interesting though it is to know the country of origin of the food on the shelves of our stores, what the consumer wants is an assurance that the food is fit to consume—whatever the country of origin. What assurances can my right hon. Friend the Minister of State give the House that any food—whether in the supermarkets or in the corner shop—meets those standards? That is the best way to give the consumer confidence that the food is fit to eat; it is also the best way to ensure that British farmers are competing on a level playing field.

Ms Quin: I am not surprised that amendment (a) and amendment No. 25 have provoked a lively debate. I know full well that Members on both sides of the House take a keen interest in the issue of labelling. I understand and sympathise with many of the points made by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) when she introduced amendment (a). She and I are anxious to examine labels when we shop. Since taking on my present portfolio, I have become most concerned not only about labelling but about its accuracy, and about the problems caused by misleading labelling.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): If the right hon. Lady has been into supermarkets, she will be aware that, before the small packs are put on to the shelf, the product usually arrives in a large pack. There is much scope for someone in the back of the shop to decide what label to put on the packs. I hope that the Food Standards Agency will examine exactly what is put on the labels after the main pack has come into the supermarket.

Ms Quin: It is extremely clear from our debates on the matter that the Food Standards Agency is able to consider

labelling generally and its importance to the consumer, both in terms of freedom of choice—a matter mentioned by several hon. Members—and to avoid consumers being misled by labels. During the passage of the Bill, many examples of the problems of misleading labelling were given by hon. Members on both sides of the House and by Members in the other place. Arguments about the dangers of inadequate labelling—especially of substances that could provoke allergies—were well and strongly made during the debate in the other place.

I was a little surprised that the hon. Member for Meriden did not give the Government more credit for accepting the amendment tabled in the other place by the Baroness Byford, the Opposition spokesperson. To her credit, she was extremely active in promoting the labelling issue.

Mr. Paice: It was the Government's amendment.

Ms Quin: The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) says that it is the Government's amendment, but the amendment to which I referred was tabled by the Opposition in the other place. The amendment introduced by the hon. Member for Meriden is a further amendment to that amendment. I am surprised that the hon. Lady did not welcome it more enthusiastically. I am grateful that hon. Members of other parties recognise how active the Government have been in respect of labelling.

12.45 am

Mr. Paice: For the record, the amendment was tabled by Baroness Hayman, whose speech appears at column 909—I do not have the exact date—of that part of the House of Lords' consideration of the Bill. It might have been tabled in response to pressure from Conservatives, but the wording is the Government's, which is why we want to amend it.

Ms Quin: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the amendment was the initiative of Baroness Byford, to whom I give credit. It is true that she agreed it with the Government, but for the Opposition now to stand back from the amendment strikes me as incredible. The least that the hon. Member for Meriden could do is give more generous recognition to the way in which the Government bowed before the concern expressed in the other place.

The Conservatives have only discovered an enthusiasm for labelling in opposition. The Labour party has been enthusiastic and active on the issue both in opposition and in government. That is the clear difference between us. Ministers have explained on numerous occasions that the Food Standards Agency will be responsible for policy and advice on labelling matters to Ministers and the public. We are entirely satisfied that the Bill provides the necessary powers for the agency to take a full and active role in that matter, through its role in protecting the interests of consumers in relation to food.

When we accepted the ideas advanced by Baroness Byford in another place, we did so in a way that was consistent with the wording of the regulation-making power in section 16 of the Food Safety Act 1990. That is important if we are not to create confusion or uncertainty about the scope of the agency's role in that matter. The Opposition amendment to which the hon. Member for Meriden spoke would expand our amendment and create inconsistency within the legislation in respect of the main regulation power relating to labelling. Therefore, we believe that it is inappropriate.

I understand the concern expressed by various hon. Members about improved country-of-origin labelling on foods. The Government, too, are concerned and we are active at European level in that respect. That answers in part the points raised by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). However, labelling is not an area in which we have a free hand, as the hon. Gentleman hinted and as the Opposition Front Benchers have not been prepared to recognise in their approach to the amendment. We need to get agreement at European level on various aspects of labelling, although voluntary labelling is possible.

Given the vigilance of the hon. Member for Meriden in looking for labels in shops, she will know that country-of-origin labelling is becoming increasingly common, especially on meat and meat products. I welcome that. The snag is that the labelling is not always accurate, which is why the arguments on misleading labelling are so important.

We have to be careful not to impose on the agency duties that it is unable to perform—a point raised by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East. We have to recognise the limitations prevailing within the single market on unilateral changes to labelling, while taking every opportunity to give consumers the information that they need, including information on country of origin.

The effect of the Opposition amendment would be wider than simply inserting in the Bill a requirement for country-of-origin rules. Under it, the agency would be given a remit encompassing general issues of sourcing—the hon. Member for Meriden appears to agree with that. However, some issues may be outwith the agency's responsibility. The agency cannot have overall responsibility for sourcing because that is often based on commercial decisions, such as availability and seasonality, and has nothing to do with food safety and quality. They are the issues for which the agency is responsible.

Although I understand and sympathise with the spirit of the amendment, for the technical reason that I have given and in light of its wider definition of sourcing, it is not appropriate to include the amendment in the Bill in its present form. The amendment has been introduced at a very late stage. We conceded generously to the concerns about labelling that were expressed in the other place—a fact that I hope the hon. Lady will recognise and welcome.

Mr. Peter Bradley: The Minister is correct to point out that we are debating a Food Standards Bill and a Food Standards Agency, not a food sourcing agency. Can she assure the House that imported food in our shops will meet the same standards of animal welfare and food hygiene as home-grown and home-produced food? That is the best way both to give consumers information on which they can base an informed choice and to ensure that domestic farmers operate on a level playing field.

Ms Quin: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point, to which he made a slightly different allusion earlier.

We are governed by both national and European requirements in this area. There are European standards for food quality and safety, which we apply. In certain

[Ms Quin]

cases, we also apply higher national standards, which is permissible. However, we cannot block imports from other European Union countries when there are agreed European standards. That refers to the point made earlier by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East.

There are recognised safety standards within the European Commission that countries outside the European Union are required to meet before they can import to the EU. The EU is becoming increasingly interested in food safety, and European Commission President Prodi has advanced ideas for a European food standards agency, authority or some kind of mechanism to ensure that European consumers' general concerns for both safety and quality within the internal market are satisfied properly in future. We want to contribute constructively to that debate.

We believe that the Government's record on labelling is second to none, and vastly superior to the woeful record of the Conservatives during 18 years in office. We do not need to take advice from the Opposition, and I hope that the hon. Lady will reflect on the fact that, both technically and in substance, the amendment is not appropriate to the Bill.

Mrs. Spelman: The Opposition regret that, like her predecessors, the Minister is unwilling to incorporate in the Food Standards Bill this important amendment about the labelling part of sourcing. For that reason, we shall press the matter to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 266.

Division No. 308] **[12.54 am**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*

Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Mike Hall.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being one and a half hours after commencement of proceedings on the supplemental allocation of time motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—[*Ms Quin.*]

The House divided: Ayes 276, Noes 9.

Division No. 309] **[1.8 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brand, Dr Peter
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire

Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Mike Hall.

NOES

Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Leigh, Edward
Paterson, Owen
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in the remaining Lords amendments:—

The House divided: Ayes 274, Noes 11.

Division No. 310] **[1.20 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brand, Dr Peter
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David

Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Mike Hall.

NOES

Chope, Christopher
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Paterson, Owen
Tredinnick, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments agreed to.

London Bridge Rail Crash

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

1.32 am

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I suppose that it is inevitable that the seriousness with which rail accidents are treated depends partly on whether there has been serious injury or loss of life. In some rail accidents, mercifully, there is no loss of life or serious injury, but those accidents nevertheless deserve to be treated every bit as seriously as those in which there have been casualties.

The London Bridge rail accident, on 8 January 1999, falls into the latter category. Although, miraculously, no one was killed or injured, the accident was, by any yardstick, extremely serious. It exposed—not for the first time—the serious flaws still present in our rail safety system.

The accident involved two commuter trains—a Thameslink train and a Connex train—that converged, in the evening rush hour, on the same line on a viaduct, as a consequence of the Connex train going through a red light. Nine of the 16 coaches were derailed, and almost 300 passengers were put at risk.

There is little doubt that, with a slightly different point of impact, at slightly higher speed, with the possibility of one or more of the coaches being toppled over the viaduct down into Spa road, we could have had on our hands a human catastrophe every bit as serious as the appalling Paddington rail crash of a few weeks ago. Yet, despite the immense seriousness of the accident, the response both of the rail companies and of the Health and Safety Executive in putting information into the public domain has been lamentably inadequate.

The three rail companies, Railtrack, Connex and Thameslink, have conducted what they describe as an "internal industry investigation". On 14 January, six days after the accident, I wrote to the then chairman of Railtrack, Sir Robert Horton, asking for a copy of the report when it was available. Today, exactly 10 months after the accident, I am still waiting for that report. Worse still, Railtrack has now told me that it does not intend to publish the full report, and may not publish anything at all.

Last Thursday, 4 November, Railtrack wrote to me as follows:

"Railtrack will be producing a summary of our internal investigation report and this should be available by the end of the year, subject to legal scrutiny and the agreement of the other parties concerned."

The railway companies seem to have been more concerned about protecting themselves from litigation than with making themselves accountable to the travelling public. The report should have been published in full months ago. There has been a reprehensible failure of public accountability by the railway companies concerned.

The performance of the Health and Safety Executive has been no better. I have been pressing Ministers at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions for months to ensure that the full HSE account of the accident was put into the public domain. Yet, on 5 October, I received a letter from the Minister for Transport, Lord Macdonald, which said:

"HSE will not be publishing a separate accident investigation report".

Apparently, all that would be made available was a press notice.

The House will appreciate from the date of that letter that it could not have been more appallingly timed. On the very day that Lord Macdonald was sending it to me, the Paddington rail disaster, as a result of which 31 people so far have lost their lives, took place.

Following receipt of that letter, I wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions; I believe that it was the most vehement letter that I have written to any Minister on any subject in my 25 years in the House. I said that Lord Macdonald's reply was unacceptable, and that the Secretary of State must reverse the decision of his junior Minister and of the Health and Safety Executive not to publish a separate report into the London Bridge rail accident.

The Secretary of State, to his credit, did precisely as I asked and reversed the decision. As a result, on 27 October, the HSE finally published a pretty thin three-and-a-half-page accident report. The Secretary of State's reply to me read:

"It is not the practice of the Health and Safety Executive to issue a separate public report except in the most serious of accidents."

If that is the HSE's policy, it should be radically changed. It is simply not acceptable that the HSE should publish separate accident reports only when there is, effectively, loss of life in rail accidents. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions must now instruct the HSE to bring about a basic change in policy so that, after any rail accident involving a serious risk to members of the public, a separate accident report is published.

I said that the three-and-a-half page report published by the HSE was thin, and one critical piece of information has yet to be disclosed. We were told that the cause of the London Bridge accident was that the driver of the Connex train went through a red light at nearly 40 mph. It turns out that the same driver had previously taken another train through a red light six months earlier. We have been told that the reason why the train went through the red light was "human error", but that is not an adequate explanation. The travelling public are entitled to know what explanation was given by the driver of the Connex train as to why he went through the red light. Was he unsighted? If so, why? Was he distracted in some way? If so, how? Was he suffering from some lack of concentration? If so, why? The travelling public are entitled to know what explanation the driver gave for going through the red light, having previously gone through both a double yellow light and a single yellow light. I have given the Minister prior notice of that question, among others, and I hope that he will answer it when he replies to the debate.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The right hon. Gentleman knows that the accident to which he refers was in my constituency. Has he asked the HSE to answer the following questions? Has it in the past had occasion to report on similar accidents with a similar breach of the rules—the passing of red

lights—and, if so, what recommendations has it made and what sanctions has it imposed under its powers? What view does the HSE take of the fact that, as of this moment, it will be four years before the safety system is in place for the junction in question and others?

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising those two points. They are pertinent and I shall address the latter question in a moment.

I shall now deal with the issue of prosecutions for the London Bridge crash. There are two potential prosecuting authorities—the Crown Prosecution Service and the railway inspectorate, which is part of the HSE. I have been in correspondence with both bodies and I have been staggered by the replies that I have received. The reply that I received from the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr. David Calvert-Smith, read:

"You ask whether papers have been submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to this accident and whether a prosecution is under consideration. To date we have received no papers from the police."

The reply I received from the chief executive of the HSE, Miss Jenny Bacon, was similar:

"You also ask whether we have received relevant papers from the police. Railway Inspectorate took charge of the investigation a few hours after the accident. The police involvement was limited and to our knowledge they did not produce a detailed report."

So here we have a very serious accident, in which 300 people were put at risk, but in respect of which police reports were not submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service or to the railway inspectorate. That leads me to the matter of prosecution policy in relation to rail accidents. Frankly, I am baffled. It is apparent that one prosecution policy applies to the road system, and that a completely different policy applies to the railways.

As the House knows, motorists get prosecuted every day of the week for going through red lights. However, it seems that going through a red light on the railway system confers almost complete immunity from prosecution in almost any circumstance, even though the risk of large-scale loss of life is substantially greater.

An extremely interesting article on prosecution policy by the Health and Safety Executive appeared in *The Independent* on 16 October. It began by stating:

"The Health and Safety Executive brought prosecutions over just one train accident last year, during which the number of 'significant' accidents increased to 104, a jump of nearly 15 per cent."

In the wake of the Paddington disaster, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions said that he was considering removing safety responsibilities from Railtrack. In the light of the HSE's approach to prosecutions, I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman should consider removing prosecution responsibilities for rail accidents from the HSE and transferring them to the Crown Prosecution Service. That would at least ensure a far greater degree of consistency between prosecutions on the road system and prosecutions on the rail system.

Finally, I shall deal with future train safety measures in the light of the London Bridge crash. The rail safety regulations introduced in August this year require Railtrack and the rail operating companies to introduce a train protection system throughout the rail network by the end of 2003. That is more than four years from now—far too slow and leisurely a time scale to bring about the critically important improvements needed in the rail safety system.

The vulnerability of the present system to driver error is all too clear. The crashes at Southall, London Bridge and Paddington were all occasioned by trains going through red lights. Indeed, the travelling public might reasonably conclude that the present system is frighteningly fallible in terms of human error. Too many people have already paid for that fallibility with their lives.

I believe that the four years to the end of 2003 is far too long to wait for the improvements that will come when a train protection system is installed throughout the network. I urge the Secretary of State to review that date and hope that he will take steps, as a matter of urgency, to shorten the time scale and ensure that such a system is in place in the shortest possible time.

1.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): Let me begin, as is usual, by congratulating the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on securing the debate. I also thank him for raising this important subject and for letting me know in advance the key questions that he intended to raise, the answers to which I shall endeavour to provide.

Before I deal with the right hon. Gentleman's questions, and go on to summarise the Government's approach to rail safety in the light of the more recent appalling tragedy at Ladbroke Grove, it will benefit the House if I briefly describe the main aspects of the London Bridge rail crash of 8 January 1999. The accident occurred at about 17.25 at the Spa Road junction, near London Bridge station. The 15.51 Connex South Eastern service from Dover Priory to London Charing Cross collided side on with the 16.22 Thameslink Brighton to Bedford train. Four Connex train coaches and five coaches of the Thameslink train were derailed.

The accident caused severe disruption to rail services from London Bridge, Charing Cross and Cannon Street stations. Thankfully, there were no fatalities and only minor injuries to a small number of people: four were taken to hospital, but were not detained. Immediately after the accident, the electric current was cut off from all lines around the scene and the emergency services were called. Two hundred and eighty-two people were evacuated from the Connex and Thameslink trains.

However, another train—the 17.25 from London Bridge to Guildford—was trapped between London Bridge station and the accident site, from which about 100 people were also evacuated. The Health and Safety Executive report concluded that the evacuation of passengers from that train was not well organised. Some passengers were left to find their own way about half a mile along the track to London Bridge, and were fortunate to escape injury despite the electric current having been cut off.

In response to certain deficiencies in the training and experience of staff dealing with emergency situations, which became apparent during the HSE investigation, Her Majesty's inspectorate of railways has taken steps to ensure that those are fully addressed by the companies concerned. In particular, the Connex train operating companies have changed their emergency procedures to ensure that a responsible person is appointed to deal with each train affected by a major incident, and to arrange the evacuation of passengers where necessary.

[Mr. Keith Hill]

Those, then, are the main features of the accident, and one practical upshot of the investigation of the circumstances surrounding the crash. Let me now turn to the questions raised by the right hon. Gentleman, which seem to me to fall into three groups.

First, the right hon. Gentleman asked specifically what explanation was given by the driver of the Connex train for going through the red light. The answer is that the driver continues to believe that he had a green signal and that he heard the bell for the automatic warning system associated with the signal. However, technical evidence and testing carried out as part of the inquiry proved that that could not have been the case. Weather conditions at the time were poor, with poor visibility. It is possible that that had an influence on what happened, but that is only speculation.

I should add that there is no record of any previous signals passed at danger—SPADs, as they have become known—at the Spa Road junction in question. The driver has been permanently removed from driving duties following the accident.

The second group of questions asked by the right hon. Gentleman relate to possible prosecution following the accident and to the publication of reports of investigations into it. The right hon. Gentleman asked why no papers in relation to the accident have been submitted by the police to the CPS, and also why no prosecution has been initiated by the HSE. The explanation is that the investigation of the accident was undertaken by an inspector from HMIR, which used its enforcement powers under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. The police have not investigated the accident. It was HSE's assessment that there was no justification for a prosecution.

I should add that successful prosecution of individuals under section 7 of the 1974 Act requires evidence of a degree of negligence amounting to recklessness. A momentary lapse of concentration in an otherwise attentive individual does not normally satisfy that test. It was felt in this case that there was such a momentary lapse, and that other factors may have had an influence. There was, therefore, no justification for a prosecution. I should also remind the right hon. Gentleman of the failure of the attempted criminal prosecution of the driver in the Watford crash.

On the broader issue of publication, the right hon. Gentleman asked about the initial decision of the HSE not to publish a separate accident report. I am in no way seeking to minimise the seriousness of the accident near London Bridge but, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware, it is not the practice of the HSE to issue a separate public report except in the cases of the most serious accidents. In normal circumstances, therefore, the details of accident investigations such as that undertaken at London Bridge are published in Her Majesty's railway inspectorate's annual report. The report covering 1998–99 is to be published on 1 December. However, in the light of the understandable public concern aroused by the tragedy of Ladbroke Grove, it was decided that it was in the public interest to publish the full report on the London Bridge accident immediately, and it was published on 27 October.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the publication of the full report of the Railtrack internal investigation. That is essentially a matter for Railtrack, but he knows from earlier correspondence with my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Transport that Railtrack has said that it is producing a summary report for publication, subject to legal scrutiny and the agreement of the other parties concerned. I received confirmation today that it remains Railtrack's intention to publish that summary report.

Thirdly, the right hon. Gentleman asked connected questions about the installation of train protection systems. In particular, he asked why the train protection warning system, TPWS, would not be installed until the end of 2003. This is absolutely not the occasion to seek to score party political points, but it is perhaps a pity that the previous Government were not more proactive on the matter. This Government have worked as quickly as possible to find a practical solution, and the Railway Safety Regulations 1999, laid before Parliament on 10 August, require TPWS to be introduced and operational across the railway network by the end of 2003 at the latest. That date was chosen as a challenging but realistic target. Significantly, the industry has now agreed to investigate measures for accelerating that process. No alternative method of train protection could be installed in anything like that time scale.

On the installation of automatic train protection—ATP—on that part of the network operated by Connex, let me say this. ATP is currently installed on the Chiltern line, Heathrow Express and Great Western as a pilot scheme. In addition, it will be fitted to all the high-speed lines as they are upgraded: the west coast main line, the east coast main line, and Midland Mainline. The channel tunnel rail link will also get full ATP.

The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has asked Sir David Davies to report before the end of the year with his initial assessment of the effectiveness, practicability and cost of train protection systems. That information will be available to Lord Cullen, who is conducting the Ladbroke Grove inquiry, and Professor Uff, who is conducting the Southall inquiry, and they will jointly consider train protection systems. The Health and Safety Commission will advise the Government on any recommendations that they make.

The Deputy Prime Minister also agreed with rail industry leaders at the rail safety summit on 25 October an immediate programme of improvements designed to drive up safety standards in the wake of the Paddington rail crash. There was agreement in principle on a range of practical steps to rebuild confidence in the rail industry.

There will be a review of consistent standards of driver training by train operating companies. A nationwide independent confidential reporting system will allow all staff to phone in safety concerns. Implementation of TPWS on track and trains will be accelerated. The means to accelerate the development programme for ATP systems will be identified. There will be immediate investigation of all incidents involving SPADs to a common standard. There will be urgent action on the 22 steps required by the Health and Safety Executive for reducing SPADs. Finally, a consistent approach to safety

management, embracing best practice, across the network will be established. A further rail safety summit will report on progress on 30 November.

In summary, therefore, the decision to introduce TPWS, the Cullen and Davies inquiries, the work being undertaken on SPADs and the rail safety summit held on 25 October, to be resumed on 30 November, all demonstrate this Government's overwhelming commitment to safety on our railways. We are now at a critical point, at which all those responsible for running our railways must endeavour to create a new national safety culture that will enable all parts of the industry to work together to improve safety. Only then can we begin to rebuild the public's confidence in a safe and efficient rail industry.

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for initiating the debate, which has permitted the House to return to these vital issues.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 November 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Scotland Office (Funding)

1. **Mr. Alasdair Morgan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): What discussions he has had with the First Minister about the funding of the Scotland Office. [96345]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Dr. John Reid): I have discussed the resourcing of the Scotland Office with the First Minister on several occasions.

Mr. Morgan: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman and his whole Front-Bench team on retaining their posts after the recent Cabinet reshuffle. However, as his job is basically one of liaison and representation, why does he require a Minister of State, three special advisers, 64 civil servants and a budget 70 per cent. higher than the budget first set? Does he believe that that is good value for the taxpayer?

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations. I must explain to him that, despite the wishes of the Scottish National party, my role is to represent Scottish interests here in the United Kingdom Parliament on reserved matters within the competence of the United Kingdom Government. It was always envisaged that more staff and financial resources would be necessary to enable me to do that, as no scoping study had been carried out beforehand. The hon. Gentleman omitted to point out that my total budget is 0.03 per cent. of the Scottish parliamentary budget and—I believe from memory—is about the same as he and his colleagues demanded in various allowances for the Scottish National party. I dare say that the interests of the people of Scotland in all the important matters that are discussed here are better represented by my colleagues and myself than by him and his party.

Mrs. Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Of course the Secretary of State requires the resources to represent the people of Scotland. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that when he is representing those interests, especially in matters that touch on deeply held religious beliefs and convictions, he does so with great sensitivity and careful consideration?

Dr. Reid: I can give that guarantee; I would not do otherwise, because of my respect for all the people in Scotland. I take it that my hon. Friend is referring to the Act of Settlement 1700, about which there has been much discussion. As a Roman Catholic myself—I am informed that, to the Government's credit, I am the first Roman Catholic to hold the office of Secretary of State for Scotland—I am only too well aware of the deep feelings and passions that surround the issue. I recognise that the discrimination inherent in the Act of Settlement is offensive to many people in Scotland and perhaps more widely. The fact that it has little practical significance does not negate its symbolic significance.

In the past I have merely pointed out that we have a heavy legislative programme based on our manifesto, which was endorsed by the people of this country and which we are pledged to implement. Neither the Prime Minister nor I have said that changes cannot be considered in future. Everyone in the House should be aware that too often in the past our country has been scarred by religious divisions. We all have a responsibility to handle the issue in a sensitive and considered fashion.

It does not help when those who have sat in this House, sometimes for years, and some as Ministers, and who have failed even to raise the matter, now parade themselves as the exclusive champions of non- discrimination. This is not an issue in which party advantage should or will be gained, and the Scottish people will not thank any party that attempts to use it in that way.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Secretary of State has explained why his staff had to increase. Apparently, it was because of the absence of something called a scoping study—although what that means is anybody's guess. Can he also explain why, when the Secretary of State had full responsibility for Scottish matters and there was no Scottish Parliament, the holder of the office had only two special advisers, whereas now that we have a Scottish Parliament, the right hon. Gentleman has three? Surely that is a propaganda machine for the Scottish Labour party, which he badly needs to keep that lot—the Scottish nationalists—under control.

Dr. Reid: I must explain to the hon. Gentleman, who comes from a party that is a master of management, that a scoping study is simple: we look at the tasks that have to be carried out, we scope the resources required and then decide upon those resources. He omitted to point out that before devolution the Secretary of State for Scotland presided over 4,300 civil servants, whereas I have about 64 civil servants, 20 of whom work for my hon. and learned Friend the Advocate-General for Scotland. It is interesting to note that the old unholy alliance between the SNP and the Tories wishes the Scottish people to be deprived of the efforts of their Westminster Members of Parliament. The ideas of the SNP and the Tories, their candidates, their policies and their philosophies have been consistently rejected in Scotland, and there is no reason to expect that to change.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): The Secretary of State talks about taking decisions on what money should be spent on the Scotland Office, and about the priorities of the Scottish people. Does he realise that the Scottish people's priority is investment in education and health? Does he also recognise their concern that continuing to invest in the Scotland Office could, in the long run, lead to a dependency culture among his Cabinet colleagues, who may fail to realise that they need to understand how their Departments except reserved matters in Scotland, and instead rely on him to pick up the pieces every time they get it wrong? Does he therefore accept that it would be much better if his budget were set by the Scottish Parliament, which represents the priorities of the Scottish people, so it could decide how much it wants to invest in that scope?

Dr. Reid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the priorities of the Scottish people are education, health and unemployment. I am pleased to say that 38,000 young people in Scotland are now on the new deal and off unemployment. Incidentally, that programme was opposed by the hon. Gentleman and his party when we commended it to the Scottish people. On the relationship between the Parliament at Holyrood and this Parliament, the hon. Gentleman—for all the tuition he has received from his learned colleagues—has misunderstood the nature of devolution. The Scottish Parliament is not a sovereign Parliament that devolves powers and money here: this is the sovereign Parliament, and it devolves powers and money to Scotland.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): May I bring the Secretary of State back to the issue of funding? He will accept that over the past two weeks he has been stripped of most of his residual Executive functions in respect of Scotland. In those circumstances, how can he justify having three special advisers, who are clearly there to advise him only on the management of presentation and facilitation, not on policy issues? Is not there a danger that by taking that approach he will play into the hands of the nationalists by giving the impression that he is seeking to interfere in what are domestic Scottish issues when his actual Executive functions are negligible?

Dr. Reid: First, the hon. Gentleman, for all his attempts to understand the devolution settlement, still does not seem to realise that reserved to this House are powers over a plethora of important subjects for the Scottish people—taxation, the welfare state, benefits, fiscal policy, macro-economic policy, industrial policy, the new deal, oil and gas exploration and telecommunications. The Secretary of State needs advice on all those issues. Incidentally, two of the special advisers are paid from the public purse and one is unpaid.

Secondly, although it may have passed the notice of the hon. Gentleman, we have just embarked on the most radical constitutional change in Britain in three centuries. That takes no little handling, and the many issues of importance to the people of Scotland and the United Kingdom are serviced by the small number of civil servants who now form the Scotland Office and by the advisers whom the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Anti-drugs Strategy

2. **Mr. David Marshall** (Glasgow, Shettleston): What measures are being taken by the United Kingdom Government to enhance anti-drugs campaigns in Scotland. [96346]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): Responsibility for drug misuse legislation, covering the UK, rests with Westminster. That ensures a common framework for action. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is due shortly to meet the UK's anti-drugs co-ordinator, Keith Hellawell, to discuss how they might work together to help to implement the anti-drugs strategy in Scotland, within the overall UK framework.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it was the Tory Government's decision to cut many hundreds of Customs officers' jobs in the early 1980s that led to the flood of drugs into the UK in the first place? Is he aware of the growing concern among the public that the police are more interested in chasing motorists than in catching criminals and drug dealers, and that some court decisions and sentences are totally incomprehensible and inadequate? Will he convey those points to his colleagues in the Cabinet, and can he give the House an assurance that the Government have no plans to legalise drugs, now or in the future?

Mr. Wilson: I give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that we have no plans to legalise drugs that are currently illegal, to set up a royal commission or to send out any mixed messages on drugs. There is no doubt that the reduction in the level of Customs and Excise presence around the coast was unhelpful in the fight against drugs. I will not criticise the actions of the police, who do much excellent work and achieve many successes, but in all our constituencies the presence of drugs is all too apparent. People who deal in heroin deal in death, and that is how the courts should deal with them.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): Will the Minister consider pressing his colleagues for a greater allocation of resources across the United Kingdom for voluntary youth work organisations? Scotland would get a share of that increase. Those organisations help to get young people away from drugs, and assist those on drugs to get off them. Money is best spent on better prevention systems. Will the Minister press for that?

Mr. Wilson: I have no doubt about the value of voluntary sector and community projects in such roles. For example, I hope that one of the United Kingdom's healthy living centres, funded through the new opportunities fund, will be set up in my constituency. Although it remains to be seen whether that project comes to fruition, that fund is another avenue of funding for initiatives with an anti-drug message. There is no particular shortage of money for voluntary and community organisations, but their place should be respected and recognised in the funding process.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I commend the all-UK anti-drugs policy under Keith Hellawell, to whom I had a chance to speak a couple of weeks ago. However,

is my hon. Friend aware that the Colombian cocaine harvest has increased by 50 per cent., and that the amount of pure heroin coming to Europe from Afghanistan through Pakistan has increased from 120 tonnes to 300 tonnes? Will he assure the House that the Government will increase the resources devoted to defending the young people of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom against the influx of poisonous drugs, which are now cheaper and more accessible than they have ever been?

Mr. Wilson: I endorse the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend, who is right to emphasise the importance of a UK-wide anti-drugs policy. Drug dealers and the substances that they deal in do not recognise boundaries in the United Kingdom any more than they recognise international boundaries. Action against them must be co-ordinated at UK level and worldwide, to cut off the sources of supply.

Dealing with the sources of supply is a many-faceted challenge. For one thing, cash crop alternatives to drugs must be made more attractive to small agricultural producers in the relevant countries. That must be co-ordinated internationally, which is undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges facing this or any society. The Government can take some credit—without any sense of complacency—for putting in place the instruments needed to combat the evil of drugs.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The Secretary of State will confirm that, in respect of organised crime and of drugs in particular, the powers to authorise telephone tapping in Scotland have been transferred from him to the Home Secretary. Will he explain why that has been done, given that, in Scotland, the Home Secretary historically has had very little involvement in crime prevention? What is the justification for the change, and why was it announced in an extraordinarily underhand way in a written answer? If there is a wider policy justification, why was the change not fully explained?

Mr. Wilson: I must say that I am surprised by what seems to be a very un-Tory point for the hon. Gentleman to make. The calls being dealt with on a UK-wide basis are those that present a threat to the security of the state of the United Kingdom. Power with regard to crime in Scotland continues to reside in Scotland with the First Minister of a devolved Administration. I think that the hon. Gentleman did not understand that, but I realise that he does not have much time to devote to his duties relating to Scotland.

Rail Safety

3. **Mr. Jimmy Hood** (Clydesdale): If he will make a statement on the role of the UK Government in improving railway safety in Scotland. [96347]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Dr. John Reid): The Government are committed to ensuring that passengers can travel safely and with confidence on Britain's railways.

Mr. Hood: I draw to my right hon. Friend's attention to the fact that in Scotland the confidential incident reporting and analysis system has been in use for some time. Will he pass that information on to our right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions?

I look forward to the day when I can come to the House and discuss rail safety on the Larkhall line. Safety concerns on that line have become greater since last week's bad news from Marks and Spencer. Can I tempt my right hon. Friend to join me in condemning that company for betraying the people of Larkhall with that disgraceful decision?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend can tempt me, but I rarely succumb to temptation—from hon. Gentlemen anyway. However, I deeply regret the difficulties in which Daks in his constituency has been placed. I know that he met my hon. Friend the Minister of State this morning to discuss the issue, and we will try to do anything that we can in these difficult circumstances.

My hon. Friend is correct about rail safety. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has taken a lead on that. It is a tragedy that Paddington had to highlight this problem again. Let us hope that some good can come out of that awful situation. As my right hon. Friend said, the tragedy of Paddington has underlined the lack of confidence that many people have in safety on the railways. I am sure that the measures that he has driven forward since then, including a review of the standards of driver training, the accelerated implementation of the train protection warning system and an investigation into Railtrack's safety responsibilities will reap enormous safety benefits.

On a lighter note, the House will be pleased to hear that the safety record of railways in Scotland has been improving, despite an increasing number of trains on the Scottish network. That is not a reason for complacency. The railway industry must improve its safety record, and I am sure that that sentiment will be echoed by many outside this House, as well as by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood).

Lockerbie

4. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will make a statement on his responsibilities in respect of *(a)* legal and *(b)* other matters in relation to Lockerbie. [96348]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): My right hon. Friend has no responsibility for legal or other matters relating to Lockerbie.

Mr. Dalyell: I wish my hon. and learned Friend well in what I think is her first appearance at the Dispatch Box. What are the Law Officers going to do—or what can they do—to enforce sub judice rules in press reports, some of which might prejudice the trial in Zeist?

The Advocate-General: I thank my hon. Friend for those kind words of welcome—especially coming from

him. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have no responsibility for the matter that my hon. Friend mentioned—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. and learned Lady, but we cannot hear her. She should speak into the microphone and not turn round.

The Advocate-General: I was explaining that my right hon. Friend and I have no responsibilities for those trial matters, which are very much in the sphere of the Lord Advocate.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I also welcome the Advocate-General to her first appearance at the Dispatch Box and welcome the fact that, according to the Scottish papers, it is not to be her last such appearance. Will she confirm that it is still the case that the unusual and extraordinary costs of the Lockerbie trial will be met by the Treasury and will not be a charge against the Scottish block grant?

The Advocate-General: I am much obliged to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I hope that he also remains with us for a long time, as there have been reports in the papers about his possible absence, too. His question is correct, but as the matter is not within my sphere I shall write to him to confirm that.

Beef on the Bone

5. **Mr. James Paice** (South-East Cambridgeshire): What discussions he or his officials have had with the Scottish Executive regarding the beef on the bone ban. [96349]

7. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive about the beef on the bone ban. [96351]

13. **Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): What discussions he has had with Ministers in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Ministers in the Scottish Executive about removing the UK–wide ban on selling beef on the bone. [96358]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I keep in regular contact with ministerial colleagues and the Scottish Executive on this and other related issues. Everyone wants to remove the UK-wide ban on selling beef on the bone as soon as it is safe and sensible to do so. It is right and proper that that should be done in an orderly fashion across the UK. To do otherwise risks creating uncertainty for consumers and confusion for the industry.

Mr. Paice: I thank the Minister for his response, but surely the Secretary of State sits in the Cabinet and so shares collective responsibility for everything that is decided there and for all Government policies. What is the point of devolution if it means that English consumers cannot buy beef on the bone because the Scottish Executive thinks that Scottish consumers should not?

Mr. Wilson: Every answer to a Tory today seems to be a tutorial in common sense. The Scottish Executive has nothing to do with the issue. It was the chief medical officers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who made the recommendations. Strangely enough, devolution has nothing to do with it because England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had CMOs before devolution. All that happens is that a consensus is reached on what is best on a United Kingdom basis. On the basis of common sense, most people would see that it is better to move forward together rather than to fragment the approach within the United Kingdom. That is what has happened. *[Interruption.]* It is devolution but not fragmentation, which we do not want.

Mr. Robathan: In that unsatisfactory reply to my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), the Minister talked about common sense. How is it common sense for the medical authorities in Carlisle and Cumbria to say that beef on the bone is safe to eat while in Dumfriesshire in Scotland it is apparently not safe to eat? Does he understand the damage that this is doing to the confidence of consumers abroad in British beef and the harm it is doing to farmers throughout Britain? The Government fixed the leadership of Wales and is trying to fix the mayoral nomination for London. Why do they not use their fixing powers to good effect for British consumers and farmers by fixing the beef on the bone ban and getting it lifted?

Mr. Wilson: The one thing that would damage confidence in British beef would be if we got it wrong again and ignored scientific advice. The record of the Conservatives on this was appalling. Their Government led us into the crisis from which we are still trying to escape. If they have not learned by now to respect scientific advice, they will never respect anything. If two medical officers a short distance apart give conflicting advice, we must, of course, respect the advice that errs on the side of caution. That is common sense as well.

Mr. Bruce: I hate to say it, but I am going to try to give the Minister a tutorial. The Conservatives want Scottish—and all United Kingdom—farmers to be able to sell their beef in a sensible way. He cannot possibly tell us, when it has been decided by the House— *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Secretary of State would give me a moment. The House has decided that each of the sovereign Parliaments or Assemblies can make decisions separately and have separate food standards, but when they want such separate standards, the Government turn round and say, "No. Because they have taken different decisions, we are not going to go forward." That is nonsense, and we are spending a lot of money, particularly on the Scotland Office, to no effect.

Mr. Wilson: The difference between us is that we have absolute respect for the consumer interest. We are absolutely determined not to fly in the face of scientific advice. Of course it is theoretically possible to get four different sets of advice from four chief medical officers—

Mr. Bruce: So we take four different decisions.

Mr. Wilson: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is a sensible approach within the United Kingdom, he is distinctly lacking in the commodity of common sense. In

the interests of British agriculture, the British consumer and the reputation of British beef abroad, it is clearly right that the United Kingdom should act as one.

I restate the point that the four chief medical officers were not invented by devolution. Those posts existed previously, and the Government are right to follow the line of common sense, which is to take the advice of three of the officers and to delay lifting the ban a little longer to ensure the absolute credibility of British beef when it returns to all the markets of the world.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): My hon. Friend will be aware that I sought a fatal accident inquiry because a young constituent of mine was orphaned when his mother was lost to new-variant CJD. Does my hon. Friend agree that the main motivation for lifting the beef ban should be dietary safety, not the anti-European diatribe that we so often hear from the Opposition Benches?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend brings a necessary sense of proportion to the discussion, which is not about anti-Europeanism or about cheer-leading for farmers—it is about the protection of consumers. Let us not forget that, as a result of the policies of the previous Government, a large number of people have met a horrible death from CJD. Therefore, we should act on the scientific advice and not deviate from it. When the whole of British beef is back into the markets of the world, it will be on the basis of absolute confidence. My hon. Friend is right to recall that there have been victims in this fiasco.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): We need no lessons from the Conservatives on common sense; they gave us BSE. However, I must tell my hon. Friend that there is puzzlement in the south-west of England. I should like him to explain to my constituents why, when Scotland and Wales can vote extra resources for their farmers, we cannot also have a different policy in England if devolution is to mean anything for England on this matter?

Mr. Wilson: It is possible, just as it was previously, for four different chief medical officers to give different advice. If the Government were so misguided as to do so, they could have different policies for different parts of the United Kingdom on the reintroduction of beef on the bone. The view taken by the Government is that it is far better to move forward together, when there is unanimity throughout the United Kingdom on giving beef on the bone the all clear. To send out a message to France, Germany or any other part of the world that beef from some parts of the United Kingdom is okay, but that there are still doubts about beef from other parts would be confusing. Ultimately, such a message would do even greater damage to British agriculture.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): What is the Minister's assessment of the relative threat to health from beef on the bone and from beef emanating from a food chain involving human sewage?

Mr. Wilson: I have one thing in common with the right hon. Gentleman—probably only one thing—and that is that I am not a scientist. Therefore, I respect best scientific advice in both instances.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Was not the scientific advice that was given last week that British beef is the safest in Europe? Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that? If we are in the mood for tutorials, can he confirm that the citizens of no other European country are prevented from eating beef on the bone, so can we please chuck all this rubbish? Will the hon. Gentleman show his confidence in Scottish beef, which is perhaps the best beef of all, and join me when I am in Scotland over Christmas and eat a jolly good T-bone steak?

Mr. Wilson: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's T-bone steak would be considerably larger than mine. However, this is not a light-hearted matter. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy). Let us not forget that a substantial number of people in this country have died because the previous Government acted irresponsibly in the face of scientific advice. That is what happened. I want normality to be restored in this respect. We must act according to the highest standards of the most impeccable advice. For the sake of weeks or days, we must not send out mixed messages. We must get this right. Then, British beef will enjoy the confidence and respect that we all want it to have, and the problems will never recur. Those are the actions of a responsible Government. All that we see yet again from the Tories is that they have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. They think that they can fly a flag opportunistically for a minority interest in the face of the interests of consumers and British agriculture.

Manufacturing Industry

6. **Dr. Lewis Moonie** (Kirkcaldy): What representations he has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the effects of United Kingdom Government policy on the competitiveness of Scottish manufacturing industry. [96350]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Dr. John Reid): The Chancellor and I are in regular contact about the effects of United Kingdom Government policy on Scotland and its economy. Like the rest of the UK, Scotland has benefited from the fact that economic policy is now based on long-term stability, low inflation and sound public finances.

Dr. Moonie: I can heartily agree with that sentiment. Has my right hon. Friend had the chance to discuss with the Chancellor the effects of the climate change levy on companies such as British Alcan in my constituency?

Dr. Reid: I discuss a large range of issues with the Chancellor. Of course, convention prevents me from detailing any of them. However, my hon. Friend will be aware that the Chancellor has presided over a recovery in our economy, and a sustained and stable development of our economy that is unsurpassed, with inflation and interest rates—despite the increase that took place a few days ago—at a record low, and with unemployment in Scotland at an all-time low. That same Chancellor will address the House this afternoon, and perhaps my hon. Friend will then have a chance address himself to the other side of the equation.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): Will the Secretary of State tell the House what representations he has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in advance of today's

pre-Budget report, especially in relation to the potential impact of the climate change levy on manufacturing companies in Scotland, and the real competitive disadvantage of the fuel duty escalator which has been affecting manufacturing companies throughout Scotland? If the Chancellor fails to announce the abolition of the fuel duty escalator this afternoon, will that be a failure of the Secretary of State's lobbying for Scotland? Will that not show that it is not the Secretary of State, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who takes the big decisions about the Scottish economy?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman knows that, along with all the other members of the Cabinet, I cannot reveal our discussions. However, he will have to wait only a little time before my right hon. Friend the Chancellor makes announcements on a range of issues. We can be certain of two things. The first is that the Chancellor and the Labour Government have presided over the most stable and prosperous British economy for many decades—even in the context of a very difficult global situation. Secondly, we should not have such certainty or stability from the hon. Gentleman or his party. Even on the one issue of the euro, they have managed to have three different policies in three years. At the last but one meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee, the hon. Gentleman called for differential interest rates for the Edinburgh region, which takes the biscuit. We all look forward to hearing what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has to say this afternoon.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The Secretary of State attracted much praise for his role in saving the Kvaerner shipyard in Govan. The Kvaerner works in Clydebank—the former John Brown gas turbine works—are under a good deal of pressure. It is most important to maintain manufacturing capacity there. Discussions are taking place with the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning in Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife (Mr. McLeish). Is the Secretary of State ready to give whatever assistance he can to save those jobs?

Dr. Reid: As my hon. Friend points out, the situation is difficult for the Kvaerner concern. I am aware of that, and my hon. Friend the Member for Central Fife, who is also the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong in the Scottish Parliament, has been following the matter closely and is involved in discussions about it. Should he feel that I can do anything, I shall of course be only too keen to assist him.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Secretary of State agree that the introduction of the minimum wage and the increase in national insurance contributions, together with the burden of the devolved Parliament in Scotland, have damaged the competitiveness of Scottish industry, as compared both with English and with other European industries?

Dr. Reid: Quite the opposite: the introduction of the minimum wage and the £100 bonus for pensioners at Christmas, the restoration of free eye tests, the biggest-ever increase in child benefit and the new deal, which has halved unemployment, have illustrated clearly that it is not impossible to combine social justice with enterprise and a stable economy. Quite apart from the social justice programme, the output of the Scottish economy continues to expand, with gross domestic product up by 2.3 per cent. in the year to the first quarter of 1999, manufacturing output up by 1.2 per cent. in the past year and manufacturing exports up 6.4 per cent. in the same period. The Labour Government have not only combined social justice and economic prosperity, but have put an end—for a long time, I hope—to the Tory years of boom and bust.

Single Currency

8. **Mrs. Eleanor Laing** (Epping Forest): What representations he has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the impact of a single European currency on the Scottish economy. [96352]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Dr. John Reid): I am a member of the Standing Committee on European Monetary Union, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As my right hon. Friend has made clear, the determining factor underpinning any Government decision on the matter is whether the economic benefits to the United Kingdom of joining are clear and unambiguous.

Mrs. Laing: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. We heard his answer to an earlier question, so I wonder whether I can tempt him to admit that the pact he has made with the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish nationalists to start a campaign to scrap the Scottish pound is misguided. As opinion polls clearly show, the only party that represents the views of the majority of Scottish people on that subject is the Conservative party, which believes that Scotland, like the rest of the United Kingdom, should be in Europe but not run by Europe.

Dr. Reid: That was a good try, but I find myself able to resist on this occasion. I cannot respond to the point about what Tory Members of Parliament represent on any Scottish matter, because there are no Tory Scottish Members; however, as soon as the Tories produce one, I shall listen with great care.

As for the policy of the Scottish National party on the euro, it has a range of policies to appeal to a range of floating voters. In 1997, the SNP said it would have a separate Scottish pound,

"pegged at parity to Sterling".

By March 1998, that position had changed: the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said that a Scottish pound could float down to a competitive level—in other words, a devaluation. Never content without revising a policy, Mr. Fergus Ewing said in June 1998 that an independent Scotland could enter economic and monetary union straight away. Finally, as I said earlier, the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) has had the novel idea of having a differential interest rate for the Edinburgh area. I shall let the people of Scotland choose which of the SNP's four policies is the right one.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Is not the European Union the second largest market for Scottish exports, with the largest market being the rest of the United Kingdom? Do not those facts support the

European and constitutional policies of the Government and make nonsense of both the anti-European policies of the Conservative party and the anti-United Kingdom policies of the SNP?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Like the rest of the House, he knows that only last week we heard the Leader of the Opposition tell us that we should embark on a trade war with France—a country to which the Scottish whisky industry sells 127 million bottles a year. Such a trade war would do irreparable damage to a range of Scottish industries, including agriculture, textiles, salmon, telecommunications and high technology. I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman was driven by the anti-Europeanism of the extremists on the Benches behind him.

However, was it not noticeable that, at Prime Minister's Question Time last week, although he had 30 minutes in which to do so, the Leader of the Opposition suddenly decided not to follow the route of urging a trade war? That route had been exposed as a thoroughly irresponsible course for any opposition party to take. That is why the right hon. Gentleman was silent last week—the first Member of Parliament to go chicken on beef.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Magistracy

30. **Mr. Martin Linton** (Battersea): What steps the Government have taken to ensure that magistrates are representative of the communities they serve. [96375]

32. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What steps the Government have taken to ensure that magistrates are representative of the communities they serve. [96377]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Jane Kennedy): My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor requires his advisory committees to make strenuous efforts to ensure that benches broadly reflect the communities that they serve in terms of gender, ethnic origin, geographical spread, occupation and political affiliation.

Mr. Linton: I welcomed my hon. Friend to her first public engagement, in Battersea; I now congratulate her on her appointment as she stands at the Dispatch Box.

I congratulate the Lord Chancellor's Department on having appointed so many justices of the peace from the ethnic minorities—I believe that the figure is 6.5 per cent.—and also on the fact that 50 per cent. of appointments have been women, but does the Minister not believe that it is regrettable that only 1 per cent. of appointments to the bench have been of young people under the age of 30? Will she consider reviewing the unofficial age limit, which I believe is currently 26, on appointment to the bench?

Jane Kennedy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words, and to hon. Ladies and Gentlemen for the warmth of their welcome. I appreciate the number of hon. Members attending questions to the Lord Chancellor's Department today—although I suspect that my fellow Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock), and I, interesting though we are, are not the main attraction.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has instructed his advisory committee to make strenuous efforts to improve the gender, ethnic and political balances on the bench. A sub-committee will shortly be established specifically to address those issues, and I will ask my noble and learned Friend to consider the points that my hon. Friend made.

Mr. Quinn: May I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on her new position? I very much welcome the answer given some time ago. What representations has she made to employers' organisations to ensure that people who are in full-time work are given the opportunity to participate in this important part of our society?

Jane Kennedy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue and allowing me to explain the work that is going on in the area. It is an increasing problem, which my noble and learned Friend takes very seriously. In literature and seminars, employers are shown that the training that magistrates receive, and the experience that they gain on the bench, can be a positive advantage for the individual and an asset to the employer. The Lord Chancellor is considering what else he may need to do, in partnership with the Magistrates Association, to encourage more employers to allow their staff time off to become magistrates.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In the light of the answer that the hon. Lady gave to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton), will she give the House an assurance that she will oppose any proposals to close magistrates courts in rural areas?

Jane Kennedy: Decisions about how magistrates courts are organised, the services that they provide and where they are provided are decisions for the local magistrates courts committees.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I add the official Opposition's congratulations to the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock), the two new Ministers in the Lord Chancellor's Department. We know that the Government are very keen on job creation, but we observe that it seems that two Ministers are now needed to do the job that was previously done by one.

Can the Minister confirm that it is important to ensure that it is the people who can take the best decisions who are appointed as magistrates? That is far more important than any matters of political correctness. While we are on the subject of the best people for legal jobs, would the Minister like to comment on the report in today's *Evening Standard*, which quotes the Lord Chancellor's biographer as saying that he may be quietly eased out before the next election as unsuited to politics?

Jane Kennedy: I have not seen that report, but given the important role of the lay magistracy, the hon. Gentleman might have taken the opportunity to ask me to join him in paying tribute to the thousands of men and

women who willingly give up their time to serve the public, without remuneration and often with little recognition or thanks. Without the lay magistracy, there would be no justice system, and the hon. Gentleman has missed a good opportunity to make that point.

Community Legal Service

31. **Mr. Keith Darvill** (Upminster): What is the role of private practice solicitors within the Community Legal Service. [R] [96376]

34. **Ms Sally Keeble** (Northampton, North): What the role is of private practice solicitors within the Community Legal Service. [96381]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. David Lock): The Community Legal Service will deliver the entire range of legal advice and assistance services, including representation, outside those delivered by the Criminal Defence Service. Private practice solicitors will be at the heart of the Community Legal Service, which will be a partnership between the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. They are essential to the success of the local networks of legal services that are being set up, and they will ensure the maximum possible coverage for the Community Legal Service, to the benefit of the public.

Mr. Darvill: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his well-deserved appointment to the Front Bench. Does he agree that private practice solicitors are essential to the development of the Community Legal Service, and that the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Law Society should ensure that all private practice solicitors are aware of local initiatives, such as the advice providers' forum in the London borough of Havering?

Mr. Lock: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. He is correct to say that it is vital that private practice solicitors should be involved in the Community Legal Service. Solicitors and the Law Society have been involved in the Government's plans from the earliest stages. There is a reference to them in paragraph 3.3 of the consultation paper, and Law Society representatives are serving on the quality task force. In addition, solicitors are serving on many of the 50 pioneer partnerships establishing best practice for the Community Legal Service up and down the country. We welcome the constructive role that solicitors are playing in making the service a reality.

Ms Keeble: I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. How will his Department ensure that private practice solicitors who work for the Community Legal Service will provide a high-quality service? How will he ensure that solicitors co-operate fully with the voluntary sector so that people may receive advice and help at the right level?

Mr. Lock: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments. Under the traditional legal aid system, the quality of advice received could vary from excellent to appalling. Under powers in the Access to Justice Act 1999, all solicitors who provide services to the Community Legal Service will have a contract. The Legal Services Commission will not enter into contracts with solicitors unless they have established that they can provide high-quality service. The days of paying for poor-quality legal services and subsidising dabblers and jacks-of-all-trades are over. Solicitors will have to co-operate within local partnerships to establish what needs they wish to provide and to make sure that services meet the highest priorities of their individual areas.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Minister is plainly keen to answer queries on the Community Legal Service as there are two identical questions on the Order Paper. Has he thought through the circumstances of typically rural areas such as my constituency, where a person might have to travel 35 miles to see a solicitor? How will the service work in reality?

Mr. Lock: The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that the questions on the Order Paper reflect a wide interest in the Community Legal Service. He is right to raise the issue of rural areas. Under the traditional legal aid system, we had no way of targeting legal services or prioritising the needs of people in rural areas. There was no way to pay for legal services provided other than by qualified solicitors, although some of the best advice—on benefits, debt and housing, for example—can come from people who are not fully qualified solicitors. We hope to develop a Community Legal Service gateway to allow internet access which will be particularly relevant to those who live a long way from a solicitor, or who are disabled. Various strategies are being developed, and I entirely agree that rural issues are important to the development of the service.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Will there be more or fewer rural magistrates at the end of the Parliament than at the beginning?

Mr. Lock: The hon. Gentleman does not understand the nature of the Community Legal Service if he links it with magistrates. The Government value magistrates and, as my hon. Friend said, decisions about magistrates and magistrates courts are made primarily under legislation that the previous Government passed, and that the hon. Gentleman supports. They are within the control of local magistrates courts committees.

Office for the Supervision of Solicitors

33. **Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test): What discussions he has held with the Law Society concerning the operation of the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors. [96378]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. David Lock): I met the president of the Law Society on 20 October. I discussed with him the current position at the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors and the timetable that has been laid down by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor for the improvements in the performance of the OSS up to the end of December next year.

Dr. Whitehead: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and congratulate him on his richly deserved appointment.

What targets did he set for the Law Society and the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors at his meeting? What does he envisage happening if the targets are not met?

Mr. Lock: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor wrote to the president of the Law Society on 23 July and set the following targets: the number of unresolved cases on the office's books should be down to 6,000 by 30 December next year; subsequently, 90 per cent. of cases should be tackled within three months, and 100 per cent. within five months of receipt. He also said that the quality of decisions should not decline. We will judge that by the views of the legal services ombudsman.

The agenda is clear: reform of the OSS is essential. The Law Society is investing £10 million in reform. It must produce an acceptable quality, and a reliable and efficient system in solicitors' firms and in the office. If that does not happen, the Government will use the powers in the Access to Justice Act 1999 to enforce a proper complaints system for solicitors through the legal services ombudsman.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I congratulate the Parliamentary Secretaries on their appointments. Will the Minister ask the Law Society whether its complaints and supervision committee has been excluded from discussions on the future of the OSS and whether the policy of handling complaints independently has been watered down? What action will the Government take to secure the independence of the OSS? Does the Minister consider the maximum compensation payment of £1,000 to be adequate? If not, what will he do, and when will he do it?

Mr. Lock: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kind words. There have been persistent rumours about the exclusion of the Law Society's complaints and supervision committee. I am assured that that is not so. Both the chairman and the lay chairman of the committee sit on the OSS change management task force. I would be interested to discover the source of the rumours.

There is no question of watering down the independent handling of complaints in firms. When the president of the Law Society spoke at its conference last week, he made it clear that client care and the proper handling of complaints in solicitors' firms should be a priority.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor told the Law Society that he considers the present compensation limit of £1,000 for unsatisfactory professional service inadequate and proposes to increase it to £5,000.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does the Minister accept that urgent reform of the OSS is vital, not least to a long-suffering constituent of mine—Mr. Philip Stanton of Greenacres, Marsh road, Shabbington, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire—who has undergone a harrowing ordeal? He will veritably dance round the political mulberry bush with the Minister if thoroughgoing and effective reform is forthcoming without delay.

Mr. Lock: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's observations. He gave us all the details of the case, except for the postcode.

The hon. Gentleman is perfectly right. There has been a long history of failure by the Law Society to provide effective complaints mechanisms for clients who have not been satisfied with the way in which their cases have been handled. The problem goes back to the days of the Solicitors Complaints Bureau and to the early days of the OSS. However, this Government took powers in the Access to Justice Act 1999 to enforce the right to complain. We took effective action and the Act gives us the stick which is now being wielded.

If the hon. Gentleman wishes to see the targets, they are set out in the letter that my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has placed in the Library. I assure him that we shall monitor the performance of the OSS against those targets. Should it fail to provide the complaints system that all members of the House are entitled to expect for their constituents, we shall have no choice but to act.

Pre-Budget Statement

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The challenge a year ago, amid global turbulence and predictions of recession. was to steer a course of stability. Now, with this year's pre-Budget report, the challenge is to lock in that stability and—by pressing ahead with our economic reforms—to set the course for a Britain of stability and steady growth.

The reforms made and the reforms to be made today reflect our resolve that Britain must leave behind the sterile, century-long conflict between enterprise and fairness—between the left, which promoted the good society at the expense of the good economy, and the right, which promoted the good economy at the expense of the good society, and too often achieved neither. Only by pursuing enterprise and fairness together—enterprise and fairness for all—can we equip all of Britain for our future and secure rising living standards for all.

Having laid the foundations with our monetary and fiscal reforms, Britain can now aspire to a new economic ambition for the next decade: a faster rise in productivity than our main competitors, as we close the productivity gap.

Making the most of our economic potential depends on employing all the talents of all the people. So, building on our education reforms and £19 billion of investment, the Government's second ambition for the next decade is that all people gain the highest qualifications that they can, with a majority of our school leavers for the first time in our history going on to degrees.

Having modernised with the new deal and with our reforms to make work pay, Britain can now reach for a third ambition in the next decade: a higher percentage of people in work than ever before.

Because a fair society and the strongest economy depend on leaving no one behind, Britain must now build on the reforms taking nearly 1 million children out of poverty and give every child the best possible start in life. So our fourth ambition is that by the end of the next decade child poverty will be reduced by half, on our way to ending child poverty within 20 years. These are decisions for a decade of reform to create a Britain of prosperity for all as together we create a Britain where there is opportunity for all.

The foundation—our first priority yesterday, today and tomorrow—is to lock in that fiscal and monetary stability. The economy of 1997 was characterised by inflationary pressures, unsustainable consumer spending and a large structural deficit in the public finances with public sector borrowing of £28 billion. Indeed, Britain was set to repeat the old, familiar cycle of boom and bust. Since then, we have created and rigorously adhered to a new framework of modern economic management: a clearly defined inflation target and clear fiscal rules backed up by legislation for an independent Bank of England and a regime of fiscal stability.

Over the past year, inflation has remained at or around our target. Today, underlying inflation is 2.1 per cent. Expectations of inflation 10 years on, which were 4.3 per cent. when we came to power, are now at 2½ per cent. Having come this far, we will not relax our discipline. Our pre-Budget report is based on meeting the inflation target of 2½ per cent. not just this year but next year and the year after that.

Early action on interest rates now prevents a return to the drastic action of the past. Those who would refuse to take the necessary pre-emptive decisions to meet our inflation target would risk returning our economy to the days of inflation out of control, unbalanced economic growth and 15 per cent. interest rates. Under this Government, Britain will not return to the boom and bust of the past.

Discipline is even more essential because of the changed global context. Last year, north America was the engine for world growth. Now this year, Europe and Japan are once again making their contribution. Although the 1998 challenge to avoid recession has been met, the new challenge is to grow while controlling inflation, and that must make us all vigilant.

I come to our economic forecasts. Last November, I said that I expected growth in 1999 to be 1 to 1½ per cent.—a forecast that I reaffirmed in the Budget that I presented last March. I have been re-reading the debates that took place at the time. There were predictions of recession from experts, and others, but the whole House will be pleased to know that, as the Government forecast, the economy has continued to grow.

The Treasury forecast is that growth this year will be 1¾ per cent. I can also report to the House that the Treasury forecast for next year is that the economy will grow by 2½ to 3 per cent, and that in 2001 and 2002 it will grow by 2¼ to 2¾ per cent, at all times consistent with meeting our inflation target. Britain is steering a course of stability and steady growth, and we will not take risks with the future of our economy.

In our first two years, public borrowing has been reduced by £30 billion—a cumulative fiscal tightening of 3 per cent. of gross domestic product. We will continue to lock in that fiscal tightening by keeping the public finances under control.

Our first fiscal rule—the golden rule—is that over the cycle there is a current surplus. At this stage in the financial year, I can provide an interim update on the Budget figures. The Treasury forecast for this financial year—1999–2000—is that the current Budget will be in surplus by £9½ billion. I have said that we will not make the old mistake of confusing a cyclical surplus with a structural surplus. In subsequent years the surplus is forecast to be plus 11, 13, 13, 12 and 11. I can therefore report that, based on prudent and cautious assumptions audited by the National Audit Office, we are on course to balance the current Budget over the cycle.

Our second fiscal rule—the sustainable investment rule—is that debt is set at a sustainable and prudent level. Under the previous Government, national debt doubled from £166 billion to £348 billion. In the past three years, debt's share of national income has fallen from 44 per cent. to 42 per cent, to an estimated 38.2 per cent. at the end of this financial year and to 37 per cent. next year.

Over the economic cycle we will keep debt below 40 per cent. of national income. As a result of falling levels of debt and lower long-term interest rates, interest payments are down each year by more than £4 billion—money available for public services.

For all those who have an interest in economic and monetary union, I can report—in the tradition set by my predecessor—that this year and in future years Britain will be well within the Maastricht criteria.

Having inherited a deficit of £28 billion, I can now report that, in the year ending March 1999, we repaid debt by a total of £2½ billion. This year we expect to repay debt by a total of £3½ billion—a total of £6 billion in debt repaid in two years, at the right time in the economic cycle.

Consistent with our fiscal rules that we balance the current budget and borrow only for investment, our forecasts for public sector net borrowing in future years are minus 3, minus 3, plus 1 and plus 4. The British economy is clearly on track to meet our fiscal rules.

In the past, as figures for surpluses and deficits were reported, Budget debates too complacently focused on dividing up the national wealth. Today, in a competitive global economy, Budgets must meet the long-term challenge of helping to expand the national wealth. Indeed, living standards can continue to rise only if Britain continues modernising. Therefore, on the foundation of monetary and fiscal reform, we must build a pro-investment, pro-competition, pro-enterprise Britain to meet our first ambition to raise our productivity to the world's best.

For too long British investment has been too low, productivity increases too slow, the potential of new markets and new technologies too often squandered. Today, Britain still has only half the rate of business start-ups and only half the rate of share ownership of the United States, where nearly 50 per cent. of people own shares. The British economy needs high levels of investment and entrepreneurship, and I now propose new measures to encourage more investment and to give more people the chance to invest.

We have already cut small companies tax from 23p to 20p, introduced a starting rate of small business tax at 10p in the pound, cut mainstream corporation tax from 33 per cent. to 30 per cent. to its lowest ever level, and introduced first-year investment incentives that are of special help to manufacturing.

I now propose to go further. Under Governments of both parties, capital gains tax for every investment, from the most productive to the most speculative, has been at 40 per cent. For years as a country we have debated why long-term investment in Britain has been so low. A 40 per cent. rate of tax on long-term investment discourages the capital formation and sustained reinvestment that Britain needs to reach its full potential.

In the 1998 Budget, we took the first step, reducing capital gains tax on investments of 10 years or more. Subject to consultation on the details, the Budget will make a more radical reform to promote not just high-technology investment but long-term investment across the economy in Britain. To Britain's prospective and actual investors and entrepreneurs I say: invest for three years and the capital gains tax rate will be not 40 per cent. but 22 per cent.; invest for five years and the tax rate will be not 40 per cent. or 22 per cent. but 10 per cent.

Having cut taxes for individuals who invest in business, my second major tax reform is to cut taxes for companies which invest. In competitor countries, growing companies do well because large companies invest in them. Tomorrow, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will give full details of a substantial tax incentive to generate new jobs in Britain from corporate venturing. Large companies that invest in growing companies for a specified period will, from next year, receive a tax relief of 20 per cent., underwriting one fifth of their investment, and companies which reinvest gains in new ventures will be able to defer tax on capital gains. That £100 million incentive can bring additional investment of hundreds of millions of pounds every year in Britain.

I turn now to the details of a third tax reform designed to create both a high-investment economy and a wealth-owning democracy open to all. I can announce that, under our new employee share ownership reform, all shares held by employees for five years will be exempt both from income tax and capital gains tax. From April, only four months from now, employees will be able to receive shares worth up to £3,000 in their companies, free of income tax, giving a tax saving of up to £1,200. Employees will also be able to purchase £1,500 of additional shares from their pre-tax salary, giving a tax saving of up to £600. For those who purchase shares, employers will be able to award an additional £3,000 of shares, another tax saving of up to £1,200.

This is the most generous all-employee shares incentive a British Government have ever introduced, and there is only one condition: it is open to everyone in every firm. I urge employers and employees together to consider long-term investment in their firm's success—in preference to inflationary wage rises, which in the end bring higher interest rates, choose investments in the future, which can bring real gains.

Enterprise for all calls for a larger number of small businesses doing well, so the pre-Budget report provides details of new incentives for small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy: a new enterprise grant, enterprise incentives for managers and a new research and development tax credit targeted at small businesses, which is the most generous the country has seen and worth £150 million a year. Enterprise for all demands balanced economic growth across all the regions and the nations of Britain so, through regional development agencies and the work of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Administrations, locally based venture capital funds will now be set up in every region of our country, from north to south.

Yesterday, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology announced that it will locate its European centre in Britain. From next year, the new regionally based enterprise centres attached to our universities will be able to draw on the management and research expertise of the new MIT-Cambridge partnership and put it to work for manufacturing and industry in every region of our country.

Enterprise for all depends on opening up competition to all, and it is time to build on the Government's decision to create a new independent Competition Authority. For cartels and anti-competitive behaviour, the Office of Fair Trading will, from March next year, be given new investigative resources and trust-busting weapons, including the power to impose fines of up to 30 per cent. of turnover. For banking and financial services, the Financial Services Authority will now, for the first time, be required to facilitate competition with a new scrutiny role for the competition authorities.

For the professions, the Government will examine how best to ensure that the rules of professional bodies do not unnecessarily restrict or distort competition. For the

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

regulatory system and following the Cruickshank interim report, the Government will consider how to scrutinise regulatory bodies and review existing and proposed regulations to ensure that they are promoting, not impeding, new entrants and competitive forces. For the planning system, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is today announcing a series of changes in planning guidelines that will, for the first time, facilitate the formation of high-tech clusters in industry. For the first time, the planning system will be required to promote competition.

For high-tech businesses that need key skills, we will reform the rules on work permits and open them up to essential workers in information technologies and to entrepreneurs. For the utilities, the forthcoming utility reform Bill will explicitly require the regulators for gas, electricity and water to promote competition. In sum, Britain will be more open to competition, fair to consumers and at the leading edge of change.

We are determined also that Britain will break out of the closed circle that has too often restricted the opportunities of enterprise to a few. We want to encourage those who start with nothing and who, in the past, thought that they could never reach higher or rise far and tell them that there is not only a chance for them to do better, but no limit to their ambitions for themselves and their children. Our poor communities do not need more benefit offices; they need more businesses creating more jobs, so we are resolved to extend the opportunities of enterprise to people and places that the economy has too often forgotten.

The new deal will now offer help for long-term unemployed men and women to become self-employed and to start a business—for the over-50s, up to £3,000 during the first year in business and in work. Help for prospective businesses will be available from a new enterprise development fund that we are creating, and we will also provide cash help for people moving from benefits into a business, including support for micro-loans for small business investment.

Our proposals will also include new scholarships for dynamic business men and women in our poorest areas to learn new management skills. To encourage the next generation of entrepreneurs, we aim to double to 200,000 the number of pupils able to benefit from entrepreneurship courses in our schools. With support that has already been pledged to us from many of our most successful business men and women, we will launch a new national campaign for enterprise under which schools and colleges will be directly partnered with local companies.

Britain needs radical improvements not only in enterprise but education, as we are ensuring. We are determined to achieve another ambition by the end of the next decade: to realise the Prime Minister's commitment to education—the highest standards in our schools, all young people gaining the highest possible qualifications, and the majority of school leavers gaining degrees. So, in addition to the university for industry, individual learning accounts, the expansion of further and higher education places by 800,000 and the meeting of new targets for literacy and numeracy in our schools, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, who has pioneered the reforms, will announce a major new expansion in IT education and skills, including 50,000 new college places. In the new knowledge economy, no one should be left out.

Our ambition is work for all—a higher percentage of men and women employed than ever before. After two and a half years of this Government, unemployment is lower than at any time in the past 20 years. This Government have delivered not only the new deal but new jobs: 700,000 more since 1997. The minimum wage and the working families tax credit are making work pay, but we need to go further. There are today 1 million job vacancies waiting to be filled. Vacancies are at record levels, not in one region alone but in every region of the United Kingdom. We need to equip the unemployed with all the skills that they need for the jobs that exist.

So, I can announce that the new deal, first introduced for the under-25s, will be extended to all those over 25 years old in every part of the country. Options will include the offer of a job with a private sector employer, self-employment, work-based retraining or college training, backed up by advice, counselling and mentoring—honouring our commitment to tackle long-term unemployment.

I can also announce new choices for lone parents to gain new skills, go to college and go to work. From now on, lone parents will not only be able to train for jobs while receiving income support, but will benefit from college-based child care places for 10,000 more children—making a total of 37,000 places. All lone parents with children over the age of three will receive notice of those new choices.

In 1909, Britain created the first labour exchanges in the world in order to link potential employees to vacant jobs. Today, with 1 million vacancies throughout the country, Britain must use the most modern technology in order to match those jobs without workers to the workers who have no jobs. We shall create a national jobs phone line whereby, for the first time in every locality, the Employment Service will continuously update unemployed men and women about new vacancies that are suitable for their skills. For every constituency in the country, the Government will provide assistance to enable Members of Parliament, irrespective of political party, to bring the unemployed and potential employers together.

Our reforms since 1997 have cut youth and long-term unemployment by half. A return to full employment was once a dream. Now, it is not only a promise and a possibility, but, in the next decade, if we stay the course, it can become one of our country's proudest achievements.

As we extend opportunities to those who are out of work, we will extend the responsibility to take up the work on offer. The informal or hidden economy is draining billions of pounds in fraudulent benefit claims and unpaid taxes. That loss of revenue, this incidence of fraud, the waste of resources, cannot be allowed to continue, especially when there are jobs that benefit claimants could take.

Lord Grabiner QC will chair a task force, bringing together the Treasury, the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Departments of Social Security and for Education and Employment. He will investigate the scale of the problem and the cost to the taxpayer, recommend a plan of action and set a timetable to crack down on the hidden economy. He will examine ways to move economic activity from illegitimate to legitimate

businesses. He will consider increased fines for fraud, and new requirements specifically for those suspected of being in the hidden economy to sign on for benefit not every fortnight but every single day.

I say to the unemployed who can work: we will meet our responsibility to ensure that there are job opportunities and the chance to learn new skills; they must now meet their responsibility to earn a wage. We are ensuring that work pays more than benefits. All our measures, taken together, mark a new dividing line. The Government believe that the way to help the unemployed is by extending the new deal, not abolishing it.

As we pursue our ambitions for growth and jobs, we can and must keep our environmental commitments. Under my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, Britain took the lead in successfully negotiating the Kyoto agreement, and I am today announcing the results of our consultation with business on the climate change levy. Our original proposal was to cut environmental pollution by 1.5 million tonnes a year by 2010. Our consultation has shown that we can cut environmental pollution even further by 2010—by more than 2 million tonnes a year—and at the same time cut the levy from £1.75 billion to £1 billion.

I have decided that renewable energy sources and combined heat and power will be exempt from the levy. The main rate per kW hour will be cut from 0.21p to 0.15p, and there will be an 80 per cent. discount to energy-intensive sectors signing energy efficiency agreements. Taken together, those changes approach a 90 per cent. discount on the levy published at Budget time in return for agreed industry action to cut emissions.

All the revenues raised will be recycled to business. I can confirm that every business will receive a tax cut of 0.3 percentage points in employer national insurance contributions. I have ensured not only that that package is revenue neutral for business and revenue neutral between manufacturing and services, but that even after the national insurance change there will be no gain to the public purse.

In the run-up to the Budget, we will consult on a new 100 per cent. first-year investment allowance for companies moving from environmentally unfriendly to environmentally friendly technologies and processes. I propose to make available not, as originally announced, £50 million, but in the first year a total of £150 million to support energy efficiency in British industry. With all those measures taken together, Britain is on track to meet our country's Kyoto target.

The fuel escalator was inherited from the previous Government. *[Interruption.]* The Conservatives cannot deny their history. Since 1997, the escalator has been needed to reduce the £28 billion deficit that we inherited, as we put in place our new measures to protect the environment. Those who have opposed the escalator—including some of those who originally imposed it—have to explain how, without it, they would have cut the deficit, made money available for public services and met our environmental commitments in the past two years.

Having cut the deficit and introduced our new environmental policies, we are now in a position—instead of the pre-announced 6 per cent. escalator—to make our decisions Budget by Budget, with the following commitment: if there are any real terms rises in road fuel duties, they will be lower and the revenues will go straight to a ring-fenced fund for the modernisation of roads and public transport.

Now that the return-leg exemption from air passenger duty has been declared in breach of single market law, I am today starting a pre-Budget consultation on replacing it with a new lower rate for lower fares. The changes will be revenue neutral.

Today I am also implementing recommendations that have come from Martin Taylor to prevent, detect and punish tobacco smuggling. Smuggling now costs us £2.5 billion a year. The pre-Budget report contains details of our decisions—new scanners at major ports to detect contraband goods, new cigarette pack marks, and new and tougher fines and penalties for those who smuggle and those who sell smuggled goods.

Our next ambition is to reduce and then abolish child poverty in Britain. The promise of the next decade should not be just for some children but for every one of Britain's children. By April, child benefit for the first child will be £15. By the next April, for the typical family, child benefit and the children's tax credit will be £23. With our 10p starting rate of income tax and the cut from 23p to 22p in the basic rate, the tax burden—national insurance and income tax—for the average family will be cut to its lowest level for 25 years.

Our intention is to integrate the children's tax credit and the child elements of the working families tax credit and income support into one single credit paid direct to the mother, and built on the foundation of universal child benefit. At today's prices, that would mean child payments starting at £15 a week, in contrast to £11 in 1997, and, for the poorest child, rising to more than £40 a week.

Our pre-Budget consultations will also examine whether through the working families tax credit or other measures we can give more help to the mother who wishes to stay at home in the first months after her child is born. Government must do more, but Government on their own cannot win the war against child poverty—it can be won only by the combined energies of public, private and voluntary sectors working together. We need not only cash but care. Therefore, the pre-Budget report will consult on new reforms to support the community organisations that are closest to people and where dedicated staff and volunteers can offer one-to-one help.

First, we will set up a new children's fund which will provide project grants for community action to tackle all aspects of child poverty. Secondly, so that we can develop new and innovative ways to support families and children, sure start will now see resources devolved not just to local government but to local partnerships led by neighbourhoods and the voluntary sector.

Thirdly, for too long the voluntary sector has been held back by outdated tax laws. We propose that, in future, for every £1 a British citizen donates to charity, the Government will contribute to that charity an additional 28p. For every £1 contributed through payroll giving, the Government will contribute 50p worth of tax relief. There will now be tax relief not just for cash donations but for gifts of quoted shares. The British people's willingness to give can give all our children a better chance, and all of us a better society.

From a platform of a stable economy and sustainable finances, we are delivering £40 billion extra for health and education. It is only by continuing our policies for

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stability and steady growth that we will be able to achieve a further ambition for Britain—to build the best public services for the long term. In our second comprehensive spending review, to be completed next year, we will match investment with reform, increasing the amount of resources available for the NHS and education in our public services. I can announce two decisions that can be made now.

Through the windfall levy, 5,000 schools throughout Britain have already been modernised. With the addition of a further £150 million to the £4 billion already allocated for schools capital, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will be able to treble that figure. By 2001, the number of schools modernised or being modernised will total 15,000—half the schools of Britain—benefiting more than 5 million pupils.

There is a strong public health case for year-on-year, real term increases in the price of cigarettes. While we will now make our decisions Budget by Budget, I can announce a new approach: the extra revenues from a 5 per cent. real terms rise in cigarette duties would go straight to additional investment in the national health service, worth £300 million a year—that is £300 million extra for hospitals and health care which could start next April.

I have a further announcement to make. From this week, the £100 winter allowance is being paid to every pensioner household in Britain. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will announce later today that the winter allowance will be paid not just this year but next year, and every year from now on. For pensioners with incomes above benefit level who are not wealthy, we propose a better deal on savings. The elderly especially will benefit from my proposal to cut the starting rate of tax on savings from 20p to 10p—some 1.5 million pensioners will benefit.

I have one final announcement. All Governments have agreed that we ought to provide the most help for our most elderly citizens—those over 75 or 80 who are more likely to be in poverty and more likely to have special needs. Some have suggested a new age-related addition to benefits. Some have suggested that the way to do this is to provide the very elderly with a reduction in the television licence fee. I have rejected that option. Instead, from next autumn, every pensioner aged 75 or more will receive their television licence free of charge. At a cost of £300 million a year, every one of the 3 million households with a pensioner aged over 75 will be able to save £101 a year.

This Government are demonstrating that enterprise and fairness can go hand in hand. This Government's work for Britain has only just begun. I commend the pre-Budget report to the House.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): This statement has one purpose, and one purpose only—to capture tomorrow's headlines. It will do nothing to reverse the underlying damage that the Chancellor's policies are doing to our economy.

Under this Chancellor, saving has fallen by a half and productivity growth has fallen by two thirds. The burden of tax under this Chancellor is rising by more than in any of our competitor countries in Europe. In opposition, the Prime Minister and his party opposed every reform that has made Britain competitive. His policies since the election have chipped away at the dynamism that took 18 years to build. This statement does nothing to rebuild that dynamism.

Will the Chancellor now admit what even the Prime Minister has let slip, and what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development confirmed last week—that the burden of tax in Britain is rising, more quickly than anywhere else in Europe? Extra taxes total £40 billion, or £1,500 for every taxpayer. There are extra, rising taxes on motoring, marriage, mortgages, saving, giving, pensions, enterprises, the new economy, dividends, property, insurance, travelling and retirement.

Only one Labour Member is prepared to speak the truth about taxes—the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). It is no wonder that the Prime Minister is trying to suppress the hon. Gentleman, or that he does not want him to have a voice. The hon. Gentleman has said:

> "We haven't increased the top rate of tax and the standard rate of tax, but we have increased a lot of other taxes, and we have done it with all these stealth taxes. I just think it would have been better to have honestly told people beforehand."

The reality is that the more that the Chancellor denies that he has raised taxes, the less people will believe him. Is not his decision today to climb down and make some concessions on the energy tax an admission that the environment was never anything but a cover for new taxes? The Chancellor has admitted that these new taxes will inflict severe damage—that is why he is making the concessions—so why can he not bring himself to abandon them altogether?

The Prime Minister said earlier this year that it was irresponsible to abandon the automatic road fuel duty escalator. The Chancellor said that to do so was impossible, and in fact he has dramatically increased the escalator since the election—three times in two years, so that it is now well above the level that he inherited. Does not that amount to an admission that it was nothing more than a stealth tax to raise extra money? Is not today's statement a belated admission of the damage that he has done to hauliers, so many of whom have already moved abroad? That business is now lost to Britain, and it will not return just because he has made this belated admission.

All those taxes erode Britain's competitiveness. Is not the world already tough enough for businesses without them having to carry the Chancellor on their backs as well? The House can rarely have heard—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I ask the House to come to order. The right hon. Gentleman must be given a proper hearing.

Mr. Maude: The House can rarely have heard a Chancellor speak so complacently of an economy that, last year, missed recession by a whisker and where manufacturing was in recession. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor laughs, but 190,000 people in manufacturing in constituencies represented by Labour Members lost their jobs. The number of business failures has risen and is continuing to rise. Even the Chancellor cannot be smug about that.

What has happened to productivity growth—the test that the Chancellor set for his policies? The OECD has already shown that it has fallen since the Chancellor took

over. He thinks that it is funny, but it is the test that he set for himself. The OECD figures show that productivity growth has fallen by two thirds since he took over. In case he wants to trash that as being only the OECD number, as he trashed the tax numbers, let him look at his own paper—published yesterday—on the trend rate of growth and the graph that shows that productivity growth has plummeted since he took over. He can postulate a long-term increase in the productivity rate to justify his higher rate of growth only by taking an eight-year average—by including the whole of the period of the previous Government during which productivity did grow by more than 2 per cent. a year. That growth just about offsets the catastrophic fall in productivity since then.

Let the Chancellor answer this: given his sustained attack on people who save, is he surprised that the rate of saving has fallen by a half? Does he think that that matters? Does he think that it is trivial to the future of Britain's economy?

The Chancellor has made much of his so-called measures for enterprise, including capital gains tax. We have seen all this before—a few concessions to catch the headlines and distract attention from the real damage being done to business. Was not the president of the Confederation of British Industry right to say that any cuts in business taxes

"are more than offset by the windfall tax, the loss of the dividend tax credit, and now the climate change levy. The sums they give back are trivial by comparison"?

Of course, we support schemes to increase share ownership, but what has happened since the Chancellor took over? When we left office, 15 million people owned shares—today, it is 12 million. Now, the right hon. Gentleman claims to be the champion of share ownership. If he really wants to help the self-employed, instead of fiddling little schemes, why does he not scrap IR35, his new stealth tax? It is already driving thousands of entrepreneurs abroad—congratulations, a new Labour brain drain.

It is no wonder that four out of five firms now think that Labour is hostile to them. The Chancellor has been beating them over the head with higher business taxes and more regulation. He offers them half an aspirin and expects them to be grateful. They do not want half an aspirin; they want him to stop beating them over the head with the higher taxes and extra regulations.

"The Chancellor hopes that we will oppose his plans to spend more money on health and education, but I am going to disappoint him . . . we welcome . . . money for those priority services."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 195-96.]

I said that last year and I say it again today. We support increases in health and education spending. It is just a pity that waiting lists are longer; it is just a pity that class sizes are higher; and it is just a pity that there are fewer police on the beat and that crime is rising.

What happened to the Prime Minister's famous pledge that Labour would

"cut the bills of social security"?

Cut them? They are up by nearly as much as health and education added together. The Government said that they would reform welfare. Well, that did not last long.

The Chancellor ought to target help on those who cannot help themselves—that is the common-sense approach. He punishes people who try to help themselves. He punishes people who want to do the right thing, who want to work and save, who tell the truth.

This Chancellor claims to be prudent. He is only prudent with the truth. He says one thing, he does another. He talks pro-business, he acts anti- business. He talks less regulation, he imposes more. He claims taxes are falling when everyone knows that they are rising. Anyone independent who tells the truth, he rubbishes. Any definition that is inconvenient, he changes. Any statistic he dislikes, he fiddles. He is the salesman who says, "Don't worry about the fine print, just look at the slogans." He is the man in the pub who says, "Give me a fiver and I'll buy you a pint."

There is a new corruption infecting British politics today: the corruption of the smug few who are trying to make mugs out of the many.

Mr. Brown: I will deal with each point that the shadow Chancellor made in turn, but let me ask him first about misleading the House. Last year, he said that there would be a recession; there has been 2 per cent. growth, so he has got that wrong. Last year, he said that investment would collapse; investment has been rising 6 per cent. this year. He got that wrong. Last year, he said that unemployment would rise dramatically. It has fallen by 100,000, and he got that wrong. Last year, he said that savings would collapse. Savings are rising; he has got that wrong. Last year, he said that we could not afford £40 billion on health and education. We can afford £40 billion, so he got that wrong.

The only thing that is certain about the right hon. Gentleman's predictions is that he always gets them wrong. He is extreme and incompetent; so far right, and now exposed as so far wrong. *[Interruption.]* They do not like it. His words were "fantasy forecast", "Peter Pan economics", "Wonderland politics", "false and fairy tale figures" and "reckless gambles"—and he accuses me of trying to make the newspaper headlines.

The shadow Chancellor's first question was about tax. The tax burden is falling. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh.] Yes, it is: 37.4 per cent. to 37 per cent. to 36.8 per cent. It is falling beyond the plans that we inherited from the previous Government. If people want to understand why it is falling, there is a 10p tax rate—a Labour tax cut. Income tax has fallen from 23p to 22p—a Labour tax cut. Corporation tax is down to 30p—a Labour tax cut. Small business tax is 10p—a Labour tax cut. Today, there is capital gains tax at 10p—a Labour tax cut. The people who put up taxes are the Conservatives: 22 tax rises. That is why no one will trust anything that they say on tax.

I listened to what the shadow Chancellor said about what now passes for a Conservative economic policy. The Conservatives opposed Bank of England independence and put at risk stability. They opposed the necessary interest rate rises and put at risk inflation. They now opt for top-rate tax cuts, just like in 1988. In fact, their economic policy is 1988 all over again. Boom and bust—that is the Tories' economic policy on which they will fight the general election. It is hardly surprising, because he was one of the architects of boom and bust. He was at the Treasury from 1990 to 1992, as spending went out of control and interest rates were at 15 per cent.

On the Conservative policy on taxation and spending, the shadow Chancellor tells us that he opposed the £40 billion spending on health and education last year. *[Interruption.]* The shadow Chancellor opposed spending £40 billion on health and education. He said that it was

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reckless, wasteful and that we would have to go back a bit and cut public spending. To pay for the tax cuts that he announced yesterday, he would have to cut public spending. Tax cuts for the few to pay for public spending cuts for the many. Over the next few months, the Conservative party must tell us which hospitals they would close, which schools they would shut, how many and which teachers they would make redundant and how many nurses in which constituencies they would put out of work.

This is not theory. The Conservative health spokesman is going round the country telling people that he would have private medical insurance for people and would cut out non-urgent operations from the national health service. Already his friend, the shadow Home Secretary, has said that she wants new charges in the national health service.

So that is the dividing line. The Tory party—stop/go. Labour—stability and steady growth; Labour creating employment. The Conservatives are the party of unemployment. Labour is the party that helps working families with child benefit, the working families tax credit and our cuts in taxation. The Conservatives would hurt working families. Labour is the party of public services. The Conservatives are the party that would privatise public services. Tax is falling in this country. The party that would put taxes up is the Conservative party.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): My right hon. Friend has received international acclaim for his responsible handling of the economy. Many knew that that was likely to be a prelude to action, and we waited two and a half years to see what my right hon. Friend would do. What we have had today is an astonishing range of proposals. It will obviously take some time for us all to digest them. What does my right hon. Friend propose to do about some parts of the infrastructure, especially transport, which will have to underpin so much of his imaginative statement today?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is a distinguished former Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and has done a great deal to promote the cause of British manufacturing industry. He is right to say that our three-year expansion on transport is necessary to improve an infrastructure that was left neglected for 20 years. He is right to say that the new announcement today that any real-term rises in fuel duties will go directly to a fund for roads and public transport is a step forward for transport. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is preparing new plans on transport so that we can improve the infrastructure of this country. We inherited an infrastructure that was out of date and neglected, and we are in the business of improving it.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): May I be the first to congratulate the Chancellor on his new appointment to run the Labour party general election campaign? I am sure that his colleagues on the Back Benches will feel that he has made a good start, but patients, parents and those who are disabled may feel rather differently when they discover at the end of all this that class sizes for the over-eights will continue to rise, that hospital waiting lists for out-patients will continue to rise, and that those who heard that they were to have their incapacity benefit cut and will see that happen tonight will find that the Government are pressing ahead, despite the tax breaks for millionaires that the Chancellor has announced today.

Is it not a fact that, despite small amounts for health and education, the Chancellor is continuing to build his war chest? Why is he not using the substantial funds available to him to tackle rising waiting lists, cut class sizes for the over-eights and restore the benefit cuts for disabled people?

Can the Chancellor confirm something that appeared in his statement but may have been missed? Is the comprehensive spending review—the prudent decision to set spending over a three-year period—to be torn up a year early? Having announced that the CSR is coming forward a year, will the Chancellor confirm that the third year of the existing plans will remain, or whether he intends to increase spending as he approaches the general election?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I hope he does.

Mr. Taylor: We all hope that the right hon. Gentleman does.

Does the Chancellor realise that on the figures that he gave today for growth in the economy, the proportion of the national wealth devoted to education, which was 5 per cent. in his original plans, will have lost some £2 billion?

In relation to tax, does the Chancellor agree with the editorial in today's *Financial Times*, which accuses him of endless tinkering with the tax system, and of introducing "meddlesome tax privileges"? Surely recent experiences have taught us that simplification, not complication, is the answer.

In relation to the environment and the announcement that the planning system will be required to take competition into account, does that include retail? If so—to talk about the friends of the Chancellor and of the Prime Minister—is that the payback for sherry at No. 10 for the Wal-Mart executives?

The Labour Government claim to be for the many—not the few. However, is it not true that many millionaires will benefit from today's tax loopholes, while a few of the poorest disabled people will lose from tonight's legislative decisions? The Chancellor has amassed a war chest, as the figures will show when people examine them in detail. His announcements on education and health will do nothing to cut class sizes for the over-eights; they will do nothing to cut waiting lists for out-patients. They will not deliver what people voted for at the last general election. Is not the Chancellor taking his election job too seriously and his chancellorship too lightly?

Mr. Brown: I welcome the hon. Gentleman as the Treasury spokesman for the Liberal party. We shall be meeting on the joint consultative committees—we should leave a section of our meetings for education on basic facts in today's economy. The hon. Gentleman says that the Liberals would spend more on education. At the election, they promised £1.8 billion a year—we are spending more than £7 billion extra a year. At the election, they said that they would spend £500 million on health—we are spending £7 billion extra a year. It is about time for the Liberals to admit that what we are doing is far beyond whatever they propose, or could deliver.

The hon. Gentleman should be absolutely clear about incapacity benefit and should not incite fears throughout the country. No person claiming incapacity benefit at the moment is worse off. It is completely mischievous of the hon. Gentleman to give any other impression.

In relation to the general position of the Liberal party on public spending, the hon. Gentleman now tells us that we should spend more. The weekend press was full of headlines that he would clamp down on public spending claims made by the Liberal party. He stated:

"We always doubted that the Government would maintain its position"—

that is, being tough on public spending over three years. The hon. Gentleman continued:

"The worry is that this was designed to allow a relaxation of policy to make headlines in advance of the election."

Far from being a person who wants to spend more money, the hon. Gentleman poses, in the *Financial Times*, as someone who wants toughness and less spending. I gather that he proposes a pledge card for the Liberals at the next election. Pledge one will be to tell some people that they are increasing public spending, while pledge two will be to tell other people that they are cutting it. I look forward to that. Pledge three will be to raise taxes, and pledge four will be to tell other people that they are cutting taxes. I look forward to future debates with the Liberal party.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): The Select Committee on the Treasury will want to question my right hon. Friend on his important and detailed statement, especially on jobs, share ownership, child poverty and pensions. Does he agree that the key to flourishing enterprise and to high-quality public services is a stable and strong economy, with the low inflation, low unemployment, steady growth and healthy public finances that, currently, we so fortunately enjoy?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who chairs the Treasury Select Committee; I look forward to meeting the Committee to discuss the details of my statement as well as other matters. I entirely agree with him. During the past 30 years, this country has lacked stability and steady growth. That requires us to move away from the stop/go of the past, and our policies are determined on that course. That is why we are tough in our fiscal discipline and why we are determined, with our new monetary arrangements, to meet our inflation target. The rewards are rising investment in our public services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Does the Chancellor recall that the first thing he did on taking office was claim to discover that the target figure for safely sustainable growth was, at 2½ per cent., too high and, in the name of prudence, to reduce it to 2¼ per cent? He now seems to have found bogus reasons for putting it back to 2½ per cent. Is that not a cynical exercise in lowering expectations and then raising them again, so that he can ridiculously oversell the current modest recovery in the economy? Although he can say with relief that we missed a recession by a whisker, does he accept that for six months last winter there was no economic growth in this country, that manufacturing went into recession and that agriculture is in recession?

The Chancellor's new figure of 1¾ per cent. growth this year means we are being outperformed, not only by the United States of America, but by France, Germany and Spain, despite his inheriting the fastest growing major economy in western Europe. When he rises to explain the reason he is now so proud of our underperformance relative to the performance of our competitors, compared with whom our productivity and competitiveness are falling, will he acknowledge that it is the result of his placing a burden of tax on business, on pensions, on savings, and on fuel which no number of gimmicky announcements of new tax breaks—which, when the details emerge, will yet again turn out to be little or nothing in practice—can correct? The Chancellor has set the country on a course of lower expectations for future economic growth and uses smoke and mirrors to present it as a triumph.

Mr. Brown: I know that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot be seen to agree with me—at least, not in the House in Commons. He mentioned the first thing the Labour Government did, but the first thing we did was make the Bank of England independent. It is interesting that the right hon. and learned Gentleman supports that policy and has said so; it is only his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench who continue to oppose it. The reason we made the Bank independent was to tackle his central point, which is that the average annual growth of the economy over the previous 20 years had been less than 2 per cent.

It is to deal with the failure to achieve growth under the Conservative Government that we have introduced our measures. First, we must achieve stability, which I believe the right hon. and learned Gentleman values. That is why we took tough action to prevent the economy that he bequeathed to us from getting out of control. Secondly, we have introduced measures to encourage investment in the economy. He will have noticed that, even though this year's rate of growth has been low, for the first time in this part of the economic cycle, investment in our economy has kept up and is currently running at 6 per cent.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentions the productivity challenge, and I accept that challenge. However, when the Conservatives left office, this country was falling down the world productivity league; we are determined to reverse that fall. I hope that, just as he now supports our policies on the Bank of England, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will, in time, come to support our other policies to improve productivity in the economy.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): How will my right hon. Friend's statement on the climate change levy change for the better the position of the steel industry? He will know that my constituents from Shotton steelworks and I took a deputation of management and labour to see Treasury Ministers.

May I also tell my right hon. Friend of the constituent who visited my constituency surgery with his wife and child? He told me of his astonishment and pleasure at how the working families tax credit had given his family £28 a week more. If that is redistribution by stealth, may we please have more?

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend draws attention to the working families tax credit, which is giving many thousands of people in this country up to £50 a week more—money that is necessary to lift them out of poverty and give them a decent weekly income. I wish the

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Conservatives would end their opposition to the working families tax credit and the minimum wage, so that we in this country could enjoy a consensus on them.

My right hon. Friend also mentions the climate change levy, which, with others, he has raised before. I believe that the sector for which he puts the case will be pleased to learn that we have achieved the 80 per cent. discount and that there are lower main rates for the levy, equivalent to a 90 per cent. reduction in the levy rates published at Budget time. In addition, that sector can claim on the energy efficiency fund that we are creating and benefit from the new proposal for 100 per cent. capital allowances for moving to more energy efficient products and processes.

I believe that the welcome that will be given to our measures on this matter today will show that it is possible to build a consensus in this country, that we can make changes in the taxation regime to deal with the environmental commitments negotiated by the Deputy Prime Minister, and that we can do so in a way that is fair to all.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Does the Chancellor think that there is a possibility that those entering the country with an IT work permit may notice those who are leaving the country in the opposite direction because of IR35—or is the former policy intended to mask the effects of the latter?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman, who has a considerable reputation in the House, should not mislead people about the new measures on personal services companies. As he knows, we have listened to the consultations on this matter, and a few weeks ago we published new proposals. Those proposals have been generally welcomed by people who understand what we are trying to do.

Mr. Maude: Rubbish.

Mr. Brown: The only thing that I can say about the shadow Chancellor is that he wants to create a situation where, even when people may be earning thousands, or hundreds of thousands of pounds a year, they pay no national insurance on their earnings. We are taking the necessary action, and if the right hon. Gentleman wants to make changes in these measures he must tell us now: is he opposing the payment of national insurance contributions by people who have personal services companies? Yes or no?

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement? I was one of those who had misgivings about the climate change levy, and in large measure my right hon. Friend seems to have listened to what we were saying. Given the opportunities that are now available to companies and trade associations to enter into negotiations with our right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, there is no reason why most of them should not be able to arrive at reasonable settlements, in view of the reduction offered by the discount and the lower rate, the opportunities for combined heat and power, and the £150 million for energy efficiency investment, as well as the capital allowances.

We must congratulate my right hon. Friend because, although many of us criticised him, he listened; and I believe that most of us are relieved and almost happy.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful. My hon. Friend is Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, and I have met him on that basis. Of course, he may be happier on Saturday when we attend the Scotland-England football match at Hampden together. He rightly points to the changes that have been made as a result of the consultation period, but I stress to him that we have managed to cut emissions by a greater amount than previously proposed in addition to halving the levy. I believe that most people throughout the country will welcome that.

Eight European countries have, or are about to have, a climate change levy or a similar measure. I believe that we must accept that that will happen, but I also believe that it can be a done in a fair and balanced way. We have put forward these measures in order to achieve that, and there is no revenue gain whatever to the Government from meeting those environmental commitments.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): Will the Chancellor make it clear that he will not now proceed with a pesticides tax, which would further devastate an already devastated agricultural industry?

While he is working that one out, will the Chancellor admit that, contrary to the impression that he tried to give earlier, he has substantially cut the road programme and other transport expenditures?

On the fuel duty escalator, would it not have been much better if the Chancellor had said that he would not increase fuel duties now at all, given that fuel duty is much higher in this country than in other European countries? If he does proceed with the fuel duty increase, will he make it clear that the expenditure hypothecated for roads and other transport programmes will not be offset by reductions in the transport programmes financed by public expenditure generally?

Mr. Brown: When the right hon. Gentleman makes these points, I suspect that he is really welcoming the fact that we are creating a ring-fenced fund for roads and public transport and wishes that his colleagues in the previous Government had done exactly what we are proposing. When I say that this is money for roads and public transport, I mean that it is additional money for roads and public transport.

Once Conservative Members have stopped their knee-jerk reaction of opposing everything recommended by the Government, I hope that they will accept that this is a reasonable way forward. It was, after all, the previous Government who introduced the escalator on fuel duty in 1993, where it remained until 1997. It is we who are reforming it, by putting in place new environmental measures that are best for the country.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Is the Chancellor aware of how welcome his statement on the climate change levy will be in the steel communities, in response to the delegations that he has received from companies, Members of Parliament and trade unions?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that his very ambitious proposals on employee share ownership will take us from passive share ownership to an active partnership stake in

many more of our firms? Will he ask his fellow Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, as well as members of employer organisations and trade unions, to build employee share ownership into their thinking, so that we have an active stakeholding economy in which the many have a stake in the firms of this country, not just the few?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who was one of the Members of Parliament in a delegation which made representations in our consultative period on the climate change levy. I believe that we have created a pattern in which it is possible to consult on such measures and to listen to what is being said by various sectors of British industry before a Budget. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the steel industry will benefit from the 80 per cent. discount, the lower main rates of levy, the trebling of Government assistance to business for energy efficiency measures and some of the exemptions. It is important to recognise again that these measures have no revenue benefit to the Exchequer; all the money will go back into business.

As for my hon. Friend's second point, our aim over the next few years is to double the number of companies with employee share schemes. I believe that the proposed package of measures to be introduced in April will show immediate results. I hope that trade unions and managers can get together to work out how they can move this forward.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): The Chancellor had some fun attacking the forecasts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude). The right hon. Gentleman should perhaps be a little more careful. I remember when, as shadow Chancellor, he said after a Conservative Budget that it would lead to increases in unemployment month after month after month. In fact, those measures led to reductions in unemployment month after month after month until this Government came to power, when the right hon. Gentleman gained from the reduction.

The Chancellor's speech started with a resonant phrase. He said that his proposals were designed to promote enterprise and fairness, and nobody can disagree with that aim. So will he please explain how £30 billion of extra taxation on business helps enterprise, and how his £5 billion a year raid on pension funds helps fairness?

Mr. Brown: The fact is that we have cut corporation tax, which is falling from 33p to 30p. We have cut small business taxation from 23p to 20p. Conservative Members do not want to know, because they refused to make the corporation tax cuts that we have been prepared to make to encourage new investment. Instead of dismissing our changes to capital gains tax, the Conservative party should welcome them. We are making it possible for long-term investment in our economy to expand in the next few years, as is the case in other countries.

It is true that enterprise and fairness are the themes of this pre-Budget report. It is a pity that neither enterprise nor fairness is part of the Conservative party's policies.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is my right hon. Friend not surprised that Conservative Members are still expressing their opposition to the windfall tax, which redressed some of the excessive profits made by the privatisations and rip-offs for which the previous Government were responsible? Has that not underlined the importance of the new deal and Labour's policy of getting people to work, the extension of which, as announced by my right hon. Friend today, is to stop paying people to be out of work and to get them back into work by regenerating the economy?

Mr. Brown: I agree. The only people who oppose the windfall tax are the Conservatives. People recognise that the windfall tax dealt with the excess profits of the utilities that followed the Conservative Government's botched privatisations. At the same time, it has made possible the creation of new job opportunities for the 500,000 people who are on the new deal. It is sad that the Conservatives want to abolish the new deal and that Front-Bench spokesmen say that it is a fraud. If the new deal had got just one or two young people back to work, it would have been a start. In fact, it has got 170,000 people back to work. It is time we had some support from the Conservative party.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): If, as the Chancellor said in his statement, the underlying inflation rate is 2.1 per cent., what was the justification for raising interest rates last week to nearly three times that figure?

Mr. Brown: The Monetary Policy Committee makes decisions—I thought that the Conservative Party understood this—18 months to two years ahead. Decisions do not have an immediate, day by day impact on inflation. Last week's decision will have an impact over the next year or two years. The MPC should be supported in what it is doing, as the alternative is a return to the boom and bust days of the Conservative Governments, and we are not prepared to let that happen.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I wholeheartedly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, especially the announcement of free television licences for the over-75s. Will he examine, however, the economic situation in the north-east of England, possibly considering a Barnett formula mark 2? The region is not booming and has been depressed since losing major industries including coal, steel and shipbuilding. We are in recession, and another 1,000 job losses are in the pipeline.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend has been, and continues to be, a strong advocate for the north-east economy. He is right to say that there have been huge changes as coal and shipbuilding have been affected by what has happened in the world economy. However, the Government are trying to ensure that resources go to the north-east, which is one of the biggest beneficiaries of the new deal. My hon. Friend will know that the minimum wage and the working families tax credit are helping thousands of people in the north-east.

Meanwhile, the new deal for communities announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is making a difference to some of the worst unemployment areas in the north-east. There are currently 50,000 vacancies in the region, twice as many as there were at the peak of the 1980s boom when the Conservatives were in office. We want to ensure that people who can fill the vacancies have opportunities to gain the skills that

[Mr. Brown]

they require. That is why we are introducing changes to the new deal today. The north-east will be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the changes that I have announced.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): Last week, the Chancellor told *The Guardian* that

"we've always been clear that the tax burden had to rise".

Is that process now at an end?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman can quote what he likes, but I have said today that the tax burden is falling from 37.4 per cent. to 37 per cent. to 36.8 per cent. No doubt he will read out that quote in full at a later date, but that is what I have said.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): The Chancellor's statement will be welcomed by many people, particularly for the tax benefits that will encourage greater charitable giving. However, the most radical part of his statement may prove to be the hypothecation of taxation of cars and cigarettes, on which I congratulate my right hon. Friend. Is that the way in which taxation will move in future so that people may see that their taxes are used to improve the services that they expect?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and can say that that is the way in which taxation on petrol and cigarettes will go in future.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Why did the Chancellor say at the beginning of his speech that productivity rates were rising when they are in fact falling?

Mr. Brown: I said that we had to increase productivity to the world's best. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] There we have a Conservative party that presided for 20 years over an economy in which the average rate of growth was below 2 per cent. The Labour Government are making changes that will increase the rate of productivity growth in our country. Instead of opposing every measure to increase productivity, the Conservative party should support them.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and especially on the measures to eliminate child poverty. Has he considered investment in London transport? Did he read the City corporation's claim that it could find £2 billion to build crossrail? Will my right hon. Friend bind it to that commitment so that crossrail gets built this time?

Mr. Brown: Millions of pounds are being invested in London transport as a result of the measures that the Deputy Prime Minister proposes. Today's decision about the future of fuel duties means that more money will be invested in transport in London and in other parts of the country.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): I thank the Chancellor for his refreshing honesty in admitting at last that the fuel duty escalator is about raising taxes and not about the environment. Does he understand the anger that he will provoke in Scotland by continuing to apply a fuel duty escalator, and does he sympathise with the annoyance that there will be because the money that has been collected will not be used for new investment in our public services in Scotland? It was vital for such investment to be announced in the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both counts. It is the Scottish National party's plans that would increase taxes in Scotland. It fought an election campaign on increasing the rate of tax. Taxes are falling through the Government's actions; taxes would have risen under Scottish National party policies. The party's failure to promote its policy successfully is one of the reasons for the Labour Administration in the Scottish Parliament.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, moneys will go on road and public transport in the whole of the United Kingdom, which includes Scotland and will continue to do so.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I offer my thanks and compliments to my right hon. Friend for his positive observations on the give-as-you-earn scheme. That scheme has enabled many non-governmental organisations and voluntary organisations to fund worthwhile projects for the poor in this country and in the third world. Will my right hon. Friend seriously consider raising the amount of money that an employee can pay over a year through the scheme?

I have some reservations about unemployed people having to attend agency centres more frequently. If such a development occurs, it must be handled with considerable compassion. The overwhelming majority of unemployed people in my constituency are desperately anxious to find work.

Mr. Brown: I can confirm that the payroll giving scheme will be more generous and give greater help to charities, especially those that receive money from employees. I want to provide maximum help to third world charities, which my hon. Friend mentioned. We are removing a series of restrictions that prevented charities from getting the money that they needed and that also made the system difficult to understand. The new system is simplified and will enable more money to go to charities.

On my hon. Friend's second point, I said that Lord Grabiner QC will examine methods of ensuring that action is taken against the informal economy. Only those who are suspected of being part of the informal economy may be required to report every day.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Would the Chancellor read the front page headline of the *Staffordshire Newsletter*, which states, "Our schools betrayed"? There is a photograph of the Prime Minister below the headline. Why are all the public services—including the health, local government, social and education services—in Staffordshire in crisis? Will he explain that to my constituents, the House, and perhaps also to Rodney Bickerstaffe, Bill Morris and John Edmonds? Will he also explain the connection between the 3 per cent. deficit—

to which he referred earlier—and the Maastricht treaty, and why the people of this country do not get the services that they believe they should receive?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is now posing as a champion of public expenditure—which will sit strangely with the views that he expressed during the last Parliament. This Labour Government have put £20 billion extra into education. Without this Government, that £20 billion would not have gone to education and the £19 billion extra would not have gone to health. We have just heard this afternoon from the shadow Chancellor that he opposed putting that £40 billion in—

Mr. Maude *rose—*

Mr. Brown: Oh yes—

Mr. Maude: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Chancellor has deliberately and absolutely misrepresented what I said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) will raise his point of order after the statements.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I repeat: the shadow Chancellor opposed putting £40 billion into health and education. He and his colleagues will not be allowed to forget that. They called that expenditure reckless and wasteful. They said that we would have to cut back and that we could not afford it. That was the position of the Conservative party, and that is what the Conservatives are all about.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not surprising that Conservative Members have not uttered a single word this afternoon about child poverty? They threw children into poverty and we are correcting that situation as quickly as possible. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must deal with the problem facing unemployed single mothers who cannot find child care during the hours of work offered by prospective employers? What are the Government doing for responsible mothers who cannot work at present for perfectly sensible reasons involving child care?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been a champion of action against child poverty for many years. As I have said, our proposed measures will take nearly 1 million children out of poverty. I recognise that we must do more and that child care is important for lone parents who are looking for work or who wish to attend college courses. Through the 37,000 child care places that will be available in colleges, we are determined to increase the ability of lone parents to gain the college qualifications they need.

We want to increase the number of child carers, and there is money available for that. We want to increase the accessibility of child care, and there is money available to expand the number of child care places. Under the child care element of the working families tax credit, there will be more money to help families pay for child care.

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): I ask this question as the chairman of a small and medium-sized enterprise. For companies such as mine, the savings on corporation tax are peanuts compared with the burdens that have been imposed on us in the past few years. I refer to the cost of derv for delivery vans, the cost of petrol for representatives' cars, the working time directive, the 48-hour week, paternity rights, the part-time directive, the social chapter, and the administrative costs associated with the working families tax credit, the child tax credit, the disabled tax credit and student loans. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that such measures increase competitiveness and job creation or reduce them?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman seems to oppose any improvement in maternity rights and in other measures designed to help working people in this country. He should congratulate the Government on creating the stability that is necessary for small and other businesses to move forward. That certainly did not happen under the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported.

Mr. Maude: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Points of order are not taken until after statements. I shall take the right hon. Gentleman's point of order after the statements.

Benefits Uprating

5 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): I should like to make a short statement on the annual uprating of benefits. I also want to set out how we are delivering a better deal for pensioners.

First, on uprating, I can confirm that most national insurance benefits will rise by the retail prices index, which is 1.1 per cent. That means that, to protect the basic state pension from inflation, we shall increase it in line with prices to £67.50. For couples, that rises to £107.90. Most income-related benefits will rise by the Rossi index—1.6 per cent.—in the normal way. I shall place details of the uprating in the Vote Office, and I shall arrange for the figures to be published in the *Official Report* shortly, in the usual way.

Today, we have already announced significant help for children. I now want to set out the additional help that we are giving to pensioners. The help will mean that our oldest, poorest pensioners will be more than £500 a year better off since we came to power. That is real help from this Government for those in real need. We are determined to tackle pensioner poverty, because retirement should be a time in life to look forward to. For many it is, but for too many it is not. We are determined to help every pensioner to have a secure and fulfilling retirement.

However, we inherited two problems. The first is a problem for the future. If we had done nothing, one in three people could have depended on means-tested benefits in retirement. That was the legacy we faced, which no Government could tolerate. So, we are tackling that with our reforms for the long term. We are reforming the state earnings-related pension scheme—SERPS—with the state second pension, and we are introducing the new stakeholder pension schemes. Because of our proposals, people can look forward to a decent income in retirement after a lifetime of hard work.

However, the second problem that we inherited is immediate, and it needs to be confronted now. Since 1979, pensioner incomes as a whole have increased, but the gap between the better-off pensioners and the poor widened dramatically. The incomes of the 2 million better-off pensioners rose by two thirds, but the 2 million poorest pensioners missed out, their incomes rising by only a third.

Too many pensioners have spent the past 20 years living in poverty, afraid to turn on their heating, struggling to make ends meet and sometimes living in fear and isolation. That cannot be right, which is why we are acting now by delivering a fair deal for pensioners with more cash help for the poorest, help with fuel bills and action to tackle isolation.

Our priority is to direct help to those hardest hit over the past 20 years, those who missed out in the rising national prosperity. That is why we have introduced the minimum income guarantee, which will provide extra help for those who need it most, and that is why we are increasing the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings from next April. Therefore, it will be worth £78.45 for single pensioners and £121.95 for couples. For single pensioners aged between 75 and 79 that rises to £80.85, and to £125.35 for couples. For those over 80 that increases to £86.05 and to £131.05.

The universal basic state pension remains the foundation of pension provision in this country. However, Governments over the past 50 years have known that the basic state pension would not do enough on its own. That is why the graduated pension scheme was introduced in 1961 and why SERPS was introduced in 1978. That is why we are introducing radical reforms for the future, and it is also why we have already introduced the minimum income guarantee, which gives direct cash help to the poorest now and helps those who would otherwise have to live on the basic state pension with no income from a funded pension to top it up.

An across-the-board increase in the basic state pension would not begin to tackle the pensioner poverty that we inherited. The poorest would lose their benefit pound for pound, and they would be no better off as a result. That is why our approach—providing extra help for the poorest pensioners—is not only the right thing to do; it is the only fair thing to do, and it is the only way seriously to tackle pensioner poverty today. So, that is why I can announce today that we shall increase the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings each and every year during this Parliament.

We are helping 1.5 million of our poorest pensioner households more than ever before, because we are determined to make sure that retirement is a time to look forward to, and of course for most pensioners it is. However, it can be difficult for pensioners on fixed incomes to meet the cost of one-off annual bills. Older pensioners can find that particularly hard, since they are more likely to be living on low incomes. Nearly half of pensioners over 75 are among the poorest third in relation to incomes.

To solve that problem and to address the particular needs of older pensioners, the Chancellor today announced free television licences for pensioners aged 75 and over. That will provide help for pensioners who need extra help after a lifetime of hard work and caring. It will help 3 million households from next autumn and will be worth up to £101. The measure will help to prevent isolation and it will help older pensioners to keep in touch and to stay informed. We are helping to make sure that older, poorer pensioners have access to something that so many of us take for granted. Details of how we shall do that will be published shortly.

We are helping the poorest through the minimum income guarantee and we are helping the oldest with free TV licences. It is those pensioners who have most to gain through the winter fuel payments. This year, around 10 million pensioners in about 7.5 million households will get £100, paid, for the first time, before Christmas. The first of this year's winter fuel payments were sent out yesterday.

Today we can go further. I can confirm that the £100 winter fuel payment will be paid each and every year from now on. That is on top of cutting VAT on fuel and on top of the home energy efficiency scheme, which will help the poorest with up to £2,000 to fit central heating from next year. All those measures have been taken by this Government. We are delivering lower fuel bills and providing pensioners with direct help to pay for them.

We always knew that the retail prices index would be low in September. We not only predicted it, we pre-empted it with all the additional help announced

today: the increase in the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings for the rest of this Parliament; free television licences for pensioners over 75, and the fivefold increase in winter fuel payments paid every year from now on.

We have a lot more to do, but we have made a good start on preventing pensioner poverty in the future by reforming the system for the long term, and on tackling pensioner poverty now by delivering for today's pensioners an increased minimum income guarantee, winter fuel payments and free television licences.

We are building a better quality of life for all our pensioners by investing more in the national health service, tackling crime and taking two thirds of pensioners out of tax altogether. We are spending £4 billion on pensioners as a whole while, at the same time, we are getting the greatest help to those pensioners in the greatest need. That is all new help; it is all from this Government and it all delivers a better deal for pensioners. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I begin by welcoming one of the few new announcements that we have had today. The Chancellor referred to the measure, but it was strangely missing from the Secretary of State's statement. I refer, of course, to the proposed new regime for unemployed benefit claimants who, we are told, will be required to sign on daily.

I recognised that policy announcement, and I think that it may be the first victory for the common-sense revolution. Only three weeks ago, we said:

"If unemployment claimants look as if they are working and claiming, or not taking jobsearch seriously, they will have to sign on at their Jobcentre on a daily basis."

We therefore welcome the announcement. It is a pity that the Minister of State denounced that at the time as right-wing madness, but three weeks is a long time in politics. If the Secretary of State wants any advice on how to deliver that policy, we are, of course, willing to oblige.

Most of what the Secretary of State said was repeats. We had the minimum income guarantee for pensioners that we had heard about before. We had the winter fuel scheme, which is also a repeat. Stakeholder pensions are a repeat. The second state pension is a repeat. The home energy efficiency scheme is a repeat. In fact, it is no wonder that the TV licence is the centrepiece of the right hon. Gentleman's statement, because all he is showing is repeats.

What was conspicuous about the right hon. Gentleman's statement was the complete absence of a strategy for dealing with pensioner poverty. He began his statement by saying that if things had carried on, one in three pensioners would have been dependent on means-tested benefits. He then announced an increase in the basic pension of 1.1 per cent. and—I should be grateful for his confirmation of this figure—an increase in the minimum income guarantee, which he does not like to call a means test although it is one, of 4.9 per cent.

We should like to hear from the Secretary of State how many more pensioners he estimates will be brought within means-tested benefits as a result of the statement today. He cannot say in the same statement that he is trying to address the problem of more pensioners being dependent on means-tested benefits, and promptly announce a further increase in means-testing for pensioners.

Does not the right hon. Gentleman remember the Chancellor saying to the Labour party conference when he was in opposition:

"I want the next Labour Government to achieve what in 50 years of the Welfare State has never been achieved: the end of the means test for our elderly people"?

What a contrast between what he said then and the statement today.

Elderly people will not let the Secretary of State off the hook with a 75p increase in the basic pension, when in his Department's expenditure plans published only in March, he assumed a 1.3 per cent. increase in the basic pension—not the 1.1 per cent. announced today, but a £90 million saving from pensioners, which he has simply pocketed.

Meanwhile, the right hon. Gentleman is hitting pensioners with a range of measures that take money away from those who had the prudence to save—the £5 billion a year attack on pension funds through advance corporation tax; the abolition of dividend tax credits which hit 300,000 pensioners who are not even within the range of income tax; the scrapping of the married couples allowance, with no replacement for the pensioners who will find in future that their age allowance has been taken away from them, at a cost of £500 in tax a year.

The Government are taking from prudent pensioners who saved, in order to finance a further increase in means-testing. It is the wrong way to go.

May I also ask the Secretary of State about his policy on benefits and assistance for families? For the past year, he has fought to get through the House a measure, the working families tax credit, for which the central argument was that it was important for benefits to be delivered through the tax system. Has he any evidence whatever that paying a benefit of given value through the tax system rather than the benefits system has any effect on incentives or behaviour?

Perhaps the penny has dropped for the Chancellor. He announced today that a year after the working families tax credit comes in, he will promptly extract from the tax credit all the payments in respect of children, and convert them back into a benefit to be paid, usually, to the mother. After one year of the tax credit being paid through the tax system, a significant chunk of it will return to the benefits system. I should be interested to hear from the Secretary of State how he can defend that as a consistent and coherent strategy for dealing with incentives for families.

Finally, as he hears the Chancellor arguing the case for lower marginal rates for entrepreneurs, does the Secretary of State have a pang of guilt about the fact that later today he will impose a 73 per cent. marginal rate of tax on people in receipt of incapacity benefit, simply because they had the prudence to save?

Mr. Darling: On the last point, I am particularly pleased that we will increase the amount of money that we give to young severely disabled people by £26 a week. The Conservative party did nothing about that for the 18 years that it was in power.

The hon. Gentleman asks about our strategy. Let me remind him of the strategy. He complains that some of what I say is repeated, but good stories are worth repetition. Thanks to Conservative policies, one in three people were heading towards retirement on means-tested benefits because they were getting so little through the pension system that we inherited.

[Mr. Darling]

The change that we are making—reforming SERPS and increasing the amount of money that lower paid workers get—will mean that most people, after working for a lifetime, will be able to retire above the means-tested level. Most people would consider that a strategy worthy of support.

Let me also set out what we are doing for today's pensioners, about which the hon. Gentleman also complains. As is clear from what the shadow Chancellor said last year, the Conservative party opposes all the additional expenditure that the Government have put in place since taking office. We are facing up to the fact that, during the past 20 years, more than 2 million pensioners lost out as a result of the Conservative party's policies.

The hon. Gentleman has told us time and again that he is against the minimum income guarantee. That means that the 2 million pensioners now receiving the minimum income guarantee would be £8 a week worse off as a result of Conservative party policy. He complains that we are bringing more people into the minimum income guarantee, and, yes, 25,000 to 30,000 people will come into the minimum income guarantee, but the point is that they will be getting more money as a result. I am willing to stand at the Dispatch Box again and again to defend giving more money to the poorest pensioners in Britain—those who lost out under the Tory Government.

As the shadow Chancellor has made clear, the Conservative party is against the winter fuel payment, £100 for every pensioner household, which benefits the poorest pensioners most. The hon. Gentleman has not told us what he thinks about free television licences for 75-year-olds. Presumably, if all Government expenditure is reckless, he must be against that as well.

The point is that, unlike the previous Government, we are determined to tackle pensioner poverty. We are not prepared to put up with a situation where people who have worked hard all their lives and have spent a lifetime caring for people end up with so little money that they are frightened to turn up their heating and do not know whether they can make ends meet. I am more than happy to go into the next election defending what we have done for today's pensioners, as well as the reforms that we are making for tomorrow.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today, during which he rightly condemned the Conservative party for allowing one in three pensioners to be dependent on means-tested assistance, but what will that proportion be when our programme for pension reform is fully implemented?

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend knows that the proportion of people on means-tested benefits during the course of their retirement will fall. It will take some time for our pension proposals to take place, because we are talking about saving over the next 30, 40 and 50 years. *[Interruption.]* It must have occurred even to Conservative Members that it takes some considerable time to build up a pension. They may have managed to go a long way towards running down pensions in the 20 years that they were in power, but we have put in place reforms to the pension system which will mean that those who have worked hard throughout their lives will be able to retire on a pension above income support levels.

The Conservative party is still committed to a policy of wholesale privatisation of the pension system—ideological nonsense. We are ensuring that we help today's pensioners as well as pensioners in the future.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I commiserate with the Secretary of State for having to listen to the Chancellor give away the goodies on television licences and then having the humiliation of announcing a pathetic 75p increase in the state pension. Can he confirm that that is the lowest ever state pension relative to the means test? Can he also confirm that, if council taxes for pensioners rise by £40 next April, as they did last April, that will take up the whole of the pensions rise, leaving pensioners with nothing for any other price increase next year? What did the Secretary of State mean when he said that most national insurance benefits will rise by 1.1 per cent.? Will any rise be less than 1.1 per cent.? Can he confirm that he plans to take action on the disincentive to save in the means-tested benefits system? So far he has told us that he will be pushing more pensioners on to means-tested benefits and penalising those who have saved. Is he content to be the Secretary of State who has brought Britain the lowest ever pension figure relative to the means test?

Mr. Darling: Even for the Liberals, that takes the biscuit. Let me make one or two things clear to the hon. Gentleman. He asked about the uprating of benefits. No benefits will go up by less than the Rossi index or the RPI. He may be interested to know—I am grateful to him for allowing me the opportunity to point this out—that the amount of money paid under the minimum income guarantee goes up by considerably more than an inflationary increase, and the child benefits and child premiums go up considerably more than they would have done under inflation, both of which measures I would have hoped the Liberals would have supported.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned pensions. I make no bones about the fact that the Government's strategy is primarily geared to helping those pensioners who need help most—those who lost out over the past 20 years. An across-the-board increase, whether prices or earnings related, would not help the pensioners on the lowest incomes because they would lose it pound for pound. That is why we have introduced the minimum income guarantee, the winter fuel payment and free television licences for the poorer pensioners aged over 75, most of whom live in some of the poorest households. Had pensions been earnings linked this year, they would have gone up by slightly more than £3 a week, but because of what the Government have done most pensioners will receive slightly more than £4 a week. They have done better as a result of the policies that we have put in place. His proposals, which he published about two months ago, involved abolishing the state earnings-related pension scheme and would have ensured that the state second pension was not put in place. They would have completely undermined the pensions programme. That sounds like a particularly mad proposal, even for the Liberals.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement. Can he confirm that our manifesto committed us, particularly with regard to pensioners, to considering the restoration of the link

with earnings as and when we could afford it? His announcement that the minimum income guarantee each year will be increased in line not only with prices, but with earnings, is a start. All the pensioner households in my constituency will certainly welcome the announcement of free television licences for over-75s.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Most Labour Members are determined to do as much as we possibly can for pensioners, particularly those who lost out in the Tory years. We have linked the minimum income guarantee to earnings. That will help the poorest pensioners—all of us have come across them in our constituencies—who did particularly badly in the Tory years. I am sure that the free television licence will benefit older pensioners, many of whom live in households whose incomes are particularly low, feel isolated and cannot keep in touch. They find meeting the cost of a one-off bill, such as that for the television licence, a disproportionately heavy burden to bear. We are making progress because we are determined that all pensioners should share in this country's rising prosperity, but we have a clear obligation to tackle pensioner poverty, which the Conservative party did nothing about during the 20 years in which it had the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): How does the relatively modest increase of 1.1 per cent. in universal benefits, such as the basic state pension, compare with the relatively generous increase of 4.9 per cent. in means-tested benefits, such as the minimum pension guarantee? Will that make it more or less likely that Mr. and Mrs. Prudence will make provision and save for their old age?

Mr. Darling: Most people are making provision not only for their old age, but for other things. As the Chancellor made clear in his pre-Budget statement, we want to encourage that. I find it interesting that the Conservatives increased pensions and other benefits in line with prices for 18 years. It is most curious that, after two years in opposition, they seem to be hinting that they would have a different policy today. I doubt it.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): I represent more than 30,000 pensioners. Having met their representatives yesterday, I can tell my right hon. Friend that they welcome their £100 winter fuel payments for this year, next year and the year after, but what more can the Government do to ensure that pensioners who are entitled to do so receive benefit so that they can take advantage of the minimum pension guarantee?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We think that about 500,000 pensioners who ought to be receiving benefits to which they are entitled are not claiming them. Three weeks ago I published research highlighting the scale of the problem and I hope to announce, in the not too distant future, proposals showing the Government's determination to ensure that people entitled to help—through the minimum income guarantee or other benefits—receive it.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am very pleased that the Secretary of State has made such a point, because the minimum income guarantee is based on the fact that people claim that to which they are entitled. Does he therefore accept that the many people who are eligible for benefits but are not claiming them will be left with nothing more than a 75p increase as a result of his statement?

The pilot studies of take-up seem to have fizzled out. It is urgent that the Secretary of State takes action to remedy the problem before he can be safe in the assumption that he is tackling pensioner poverty. The Government have said that they are looking at capital thresholds for means-tested benefits. Increasing such thresholds would be an easy way of addressing the problem.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman raises several points. On the latter, the Government have made it clear that we are concerned about capital limits. We want to encourage people to save, and they ought to be rewarded for doing so.

On take-up, the pilot projects have not fizzled out. They are being assessed and, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Henderson), we hope to announce the conclusion of them before announcing further steps to ensure that pensioners who are entitled to the minimum income guarantee and other benefits receive them.

Yes, the basic state pension's value is being maintained, but the minimum income guarantee goes to those poorest pensioners who lost out. I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would agree that our concern must be particularly for pensioners who have received the least over the past few years. The winter fuel payment—quite significant help—will be going to every eligible pensioner household in the next few weeks. In addition, of course, from next year, there will be free television licences for over-75s. I remind the hon. Gentleman, too, that we took 200,000 pensioners who were paying tax out of such a bracket. All that adds up to valuable support for pensioners who, as I say, were neglected for far too long under the Conservatives.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): As one of the 100 Members of Parliament who have long campaigned for the restoration of the link between pensions and earnings, may I congratulate the Government on giving benefits to pensioners that are at least equivalent to—and possibly higher than—the amount that they would have received had the link been restored? None the less, there is a serious problem, and the campaign to restore the link must go on.

At least 500,000 pensioners do not claim the minimum income guarantee, although they are the poorest pensioners. The reason is that they have worked all their lives, never claimed any benefit, made contributions at the rate of inflation for 45 years or so and will not demean themselves by filling out forms and claiming a hand-out. They see the basic state pension as a right. There is therefore a great difference between increasing it and giving more hand-outs.

Although the Government are right to give prime attention to helping the poorest pensioners, the Minister and I were elected on a pledge that all pensioners would share fairly in the growing prosperity of the nation.

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

We must address the fact that a group of the poorest pensioners are losing out before we return to the country to ask for their support.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right that everyone on the Labour Benches was elected on a pledge to ensure that pensioners shared fairly in the country's rising prosperity. We are delivering on that. I think that my hon. Friend would accept that we are right to concentrate the additional money that we are making available—some £4 billion—on the poorest pensioners who have lost out over the past 20 years. An across-the-board increase does not help the poorest pensioners, because they lose any such increase pound for pound. Many at the top end of the scale would not of course notice the difference in their weekly income.

I do not regard claiming an entitlement from the state as in any way demeaning. We must ensure that we make it far easier for people who are entitled to claim something from the state to do so. I readily agree that the Benefits Agency and the Department of Social Security have some way to go in doing that. However, having given people a right under the minimum guarantee, I am determined to ensure, as my hon. Friend would agree, that every single pensioner who is entitled to receive MIG and other benefits does so. The steps that we shall be announcing in the not too distant future will ensure that that occurs.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Undoubtedly, pensioners will welcome the statement about the television licence and the help with winter fuel bills. However, does the right hon. Gentleman realise that his other comments will sound hollow to them, especially after next April, bearing in mind what they said when the retail prices index figures for September were announced and they discovered that their increase would be only 75p a week, despite the fact that they will face additional council tax bills and higher retail prices? Pensioners will be confused by the idea that a Cabinet Minister can proclaim a 1.1 per cent. increase as such a good deal, because they know that his pay has increased by more than double that rate.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is the first Conservative—and, for all I know, the only Conservative—to welcome the introduction of free television licences and the help with winter fuel bills. I am glad that he has done so, although it will no doubt occur to him that there is something contradictory in welcoming those while denouncing our public expenditure plans—*[Interruption.]* Is he saying that he does not denounce our plans? A rebel already!

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman cannot both criticise the increases that I have announced today, and back the shadow Social Security spokesman, who is pledged to slash social security spending. As nearly half social security spending goes on pensions, if the Conservatives really want to slash that spending, they will have to tell us which pensioners will lose out and what benefits will go.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): I am still a few years away from my own entitlement to the free television licence for those over 75, but may I say how enormously welcome it will be to thousands of my constituents. Is it not increasingly clear that the Conservatives would snatch that free television licence from thousands—no, millions—of pensioners?

Mr. Darling: I said that retirement should be a life to look forward to, and my hon. Friend has a long time to look forward to it. He is right; the Conservatives, because of their opposition to our public expenditure plans, would remove the winter fuel payments. They are also against the minimum income guarantee, so their policy would cost the poorest pensioners about £8 a week—and they would deny the funding for the free television licences. They are therefore in no position to say that if they were in power things would be better. People will look back at what they did over the past 20 years; the Conservatives are the reason why there is so much pensioner poverty today.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Pensioners in Northern Ireland will welcome the £100 winter fuel payment, and no doubt those over 75 will welcome the free television licence. However, partly because of the high unemployment that we have had, and also because of the lack of opportunity to invest in private pensions, they are among the poorest pensioners in the United Kingdom, and there will be disappointment at the bottom end of the income scale. Can the Secretary of State assure me that every effort will be made to ensure that those in Northern Ireland who qualify for the minimum income guarantee will be encouraged to apply for the benefits to which they are entitled?

Mr. Darling: I am sure that people in Northern Ireland will welcome the minimum income guarantee in particular. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that many pensioners there did very badly during the 18 years that the Tories were in power, and those people will look to the minimum income guarantee to protect them. As for the take-up campaign, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, social security in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend will want to take appropriate action there as well.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. However, will he confirm that the Government's objective is to reduce the proportion of state expenditure that goes on pensions from 60 to 40 per cent. over the next 50 years? Does he not understand that the refusal to uprate the basic state pension in line with earnings has created much ill feeling among many pensioners organisations, and that his argument that to do so would lead to extensive clawback is a self-fulfilling prophecy? If he altered the rules on clawback of other benefits, the benefit that pensioners would derive from an increase in the state pension in line with earnings, rather than an inadequate 75p increase, would do much to eliminate pensioner poverty. Above all, it would guarantee an adequate level of state pension for the future, which his current system does not do. All it does is create an expensive minimum income guarantee, which is costly to administer. A basic non-means-tested rise would be much cheaper to administer.

Mr. Darling: Let me deal first with the Government's long-term plans, which are to encourage moderate and

higher earners to get funded pensions, because we believe that they will then be far better off. History shows that that is the case. We will spend some £10 billion, despite the changes that we are making, but our policy is clear—we want as many people as possible who can get funded pensions to get them. Alongside that, through the reforms we are making to the state earnings-related pension, with the state second pension, we are ensuring that those on low earnings—less than £9,000 a year—double the amount of pension they will get. I hope that my hon. Friend welcomes that.

My hon. Friend also asked about the earnings link. Restoring the earnings link would, by 2020, cost some £18 billion. That would have to be funded, so we have to ask whether that is the best way to help pensioners. I believe that the best way to help pensioners is to continue the policies that I have announced today and ensure that we give most help to those pensioners who have lost out—today's pensioners who have done so badly over the past 20 years—and for the future, to encourage future pensioners who can save to do so. For those future pensioners now on moderate or low earnings, we will give additional state help.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): The Red Book published in March at the time of the Budget predicted that social security spending would increase dramatically in every successive year up to 2002. Is that forecast still valid?

Mr. Darling: Social security spending is rising at well under half the rate that it rose under the Conservatives. That is because we have public expenditure under control, and we are not spending money on economic waste because of high unemployment. We are spending far more money on those people who should be supported—those who lost out under the Conservative party during its 18 years in office.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I am reassured that my right hon. Friend wishes to reduce the proportion of pensioners reliant on means-tested benefits. As a measure of the success of the Government's policies, will he introduce targets for the reduction in the number of pensioners living below the poverty line and the number reliant on means-tested benefits?

Mr. Darling: In case my hon. Friend has not had the opportunity to read the report we published in September, which set out the Government's strategy for combating poverty and the causes of poverty and promoting opportunity for people, I can tell her that it sets out targets for pensioners and the rest of the age range. If she has not read it, I strongly commend what I believe to be an excellent document.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): Given that the oldest pensioners tend to be the poorest pensioners and that the Government intend to target the television licence fee concession on the basis of age, why has not the Secretary of State taken the opportunity of this statement to announce a long-overdue increase in the age addition for the over-80s, which has not been increased from 25p since 1971?

Mr. Darling: I should have thought that a £100 television licence was quite an increase from the 25p the hon. Gentleman mentions. I think that he would agree that we have done much more to help older, poorer pensioners than the proposals made by his party's spokesman would achieve, which would have been paid for by abolishing SERPS and would have undermined today's pension industry—something that I would have thought would cause concern to most reasonable people.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the policies he has adopted to try to help pensioners. Will he continue to try to explain to the British people—and, as seems necessary, to the British Parliament—that pensioners are not a homogenous group of poor people? Some pensioners are rich, some are in the middle and some are poor. The fact that my right hon. Friend is pursuing a variety of policies means that we can target help on pensioners who need it, without wasting money on those who do not.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right. Too often, people assume that all pensioners are the same. In the past 20 years, the income of pensioners as a whole has risen by more than that of any other sector of society. The problem is that, although the income of the 2 million better-off pensioners went up by two thirds, the income of the 2 million at the other end of the scale went up by less than a third, in some cases.

The Government have to devise a pension strategy that meets the needs of all pensioners and takes pensioners as we find them today. That is why we have introduced the minimum income guarantee for the poorest pensioners. The winter fuel payment benefits all pensioners, but disproportionately benefits those on lower incomes. In addition, the free television licence will benefit the older, poorer pensioners.

The changes that we have made to take 200,000 pensioners out of tax will benefit those who are better off. The Government's pensions strategy is therefore designed to deal with the needs of today's pensioners, no matter who or where they are.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I commiserate with the Secretary of State on having only one new announcement to make at the Dispatch Box today. Clearly, his statement that pensions will rise only by a measly 75p this year is very unpopular with Labour Back Bench Members.

I welcome the Chancellor's announcement of free television licences for pensioners over 75, as will Sir Denis and Lady Thatcher, who will be beneficiaries of the proposals. However, I remind the Secretary of State of what my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said about the Government's figure for the rise in pensions. The right hon. Gentleman spoke of a rise of 1.3 per cent., but does he accept that the true rise, as my hon. Friend said, will be of only 1.1 per cent., and that £90 million will have been taken out of the mouths of pensioners?

Mr. Darling: Talking of Lady Thatcher—which we sometimes do—I seem to remember that she was head of a Government who, some years ago, took concessionary television licences away from an awful lot of pensioners. I suspect that those pensioners will remember that. They will not be consoled by the fact that there are now two

[Mr. Darling]

Conservatives prepared to welcome the Government's initiative in providing free television licences for all 75-year-olds.

However, the hon. Lady will have to have a word with the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). At the Tory party conference, he pledged that a Tory Government would slash social security spending. *[Interruption.]* No wonder she is pointing at him. Her welcome for the steps that we are taking, and his policy pledges, are totally inconsistent.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): How does the Secretary of State justify the fact that, by the year 2001, an estimated 300,000 taxpayers, including 90,000 sole earners, will have to pay a marginal tax rate of 46 per cent. because of the tapering of the new child care element of the working families tax credit? Is the right hon. Gentleman proud that he intends to plunder the pockets of the people in that way?

Mr. Darling: I am very proud of the fact that this Labour Government introduced the working families tax credit. What is more, I am proud too that the Government reduced the marginal rates of tax effectively being paid by people who, when they went into work, found themselves worse off because of the Tory benefit rules.

I shall also be very happy to go into the next election pointing out that Conservative Members have pledged to get rid of the working families tax credit. That will mean a huge tax increase for the many people who have gained under this Labour Government.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I welcome the announcement of free television licences for pensioners aged 75 and over, although I should be happy to explain sometime to the Secretary of State how licences could be done away with for every age group.

I congratulate the Secretary of State too on the way in which he very carefully did not say that every pensioner household would get the minimum income guarantee, as the House was told last year. Will he say how many million pensioner households on lower incomes will not get that guarantee, and whether he intends to raise the capital limits? Also, will he say how it can be fair that a 64-year-old man who spends £8,000 on a car before he retires will get the extra increase and the minimum guarantee, whereas the guy who saves his money will not? Surely that is not equitable among pensioners.

Mr. Darling: The Tory edifice is crumbling. The hon. Gentleman is the third Tory in a row to oppose the Conservative Front-Bench line on spending. He wants even more free television licences. He cannot have it both ways. The Conservative party opposes our public expenditure plans—those plans that are introducing the minimum income guarantee, free television licences, winter fuel payments and all the other help that is going to pensioners. For the avoidance of doubt, the minimum income guarantee goes to those pensioners who qualify for it. That is as plain as a pikestaff—even he should be able to see that.

At the end of the day, Opposition Members have to face up to the fact that for 18 years they did nothing for the poorest pensioners, who lost out as a result. It is this Government who are helping the poorest pensioners through the minimum income guarantee, winter fuel payments and free television licences. Britain's poorest and oldest pensioners will be £500 a year better off as a result of this Labour Government.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), the right hon. Gentleman said that he was particularly proud of giving additional money to young disabled people. Is that pride tinged with a little shame that the money to pay for that is being taken away from older disabled people on slightly above the minimum income?

Mr. Darling: No, it is not. While Tory Back Benchers are willing to welcome free television licences for the over-75s, we have had not one word about it from those on the Front Bench. We can take it that the reason that Front-Bench Conservatives are saying nothing is that that is something else that would be cut under any future Conservative Government.

As for disability, I repeat that we are giving more money to the young severely disabled. We are giving nearly £40 a week more to three and four-year-olds who have difficulty in moving. In addition, we are spending more on the disabled person's tax credit, on the disability income guarantee, and on providing pensions for disabled people with broken work records and for carers, all of which is opposed by the Tory party, which shows yet again that the Tories' opposition to the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill is opportunism pure and simple.

The Government have an excellent record. We are helping people who are disabled, helping pensioners, helping people get back into work and tackling poverty—something that the Tory party never did and never would do.

Points of Order

5.48 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For many Back Benchers, particularly those who are relatively new to the House, once a statement is read it is important to be able to peruse a copy in detail. When I went to the Vote Office straight after the Chancellor's statement, it was not available. I was told that it would not be until it appeared in *Hansard* tomorrow morning. Do you not feel that that is unacceptable? Something that is read into the record of the proceedings of the House should immediately be available for us to interpret.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Making statements available is a matter for Ministers. Therefore, I hope that they will note what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House has been seriously misled this afternoon—inadvertently, I am sure—by the Chancellor, who said that my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor was opposed to the £40 billion more for health and education. I was sitting by my right hon. Friend and I heard him say the precise reverse. Indeed, we have done so on many occasions. We are in favour of and agree with the additional £40 billion for health and education and it is a travesty to say anything else.

Will you give the House some indication that you would be minded to allow the Chancellor to make a personal statement later today if he wishes to set the record straight, as I am sure he will as a man of good faith, once he recognises the serious mistake that he has made?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Those are matters for debate.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): No, they are not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will give me credit for knowing something about the rules of the House. He will learn. The point raised is a matter for debate. The words of the Chancellor are no responsibility of the Chair. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) may have helped to put the matter right.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to take more of the House's time, but you will know that in the main business there is an allocation of time motion that excludes consideration of amendments tabled by Opposition Members. It allows amendments to be put only by Ministers of the Crown. Have you considered that point? Has such a limit on debate been imposed by a guillotine motion before? Can it possibly be within the rules of the House to stop Opposition amendments being considered in a debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not an uncommon practice when the guillotine comes down.

National Science Strategy

5.51 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the establishment of a national science strategy; to create a National Science Strategy Council to monitor levels of funding, to consult scientific organisations and to advise the Secretary of State; and for connected purposes.

I hate to get in the way of a good argument across the Floor.

It is becoming ever more apparent that science and technology play an important, central role in determining political decisions and will do so in future. We heard the phrase "Science is on our side" in the beef debate, and it has been said that good science will take the debate on genetically modified organisms—or indeed on cannabis, cancer treatments or other matters of public concern—forward. Such phrases are part and parcel of life in this House and of our way of life in general. They bounce around the airwaves and are often on people's lips.

It is important for the politics of the environment that we take science and technology seriously. In September 1999, a dramatic rise in global land temperature raised the prospect of typhoons and environmental problems that must be taken seriously in our political decision making. Even health changes in human populations may be affected by such rises. Scientific assessments and information can inform, but not pre-empt, political decision making.

Science and technology plays, and will continue to play, a major role in the so-called enterprise culture. I believe that it underpins the whole issue. Without a solid scientific base, it will fail. Such a base has been maintained over the years in the United Kingdom and can certainly be correlated with wealth creation. However, it has been delivered amateurishly in the periods of boom and bust. There have been more busts than booms in scientific and technological advance. Only if that base is sustained and allowed to grow, will we be able to play a competitive role in the world and create a viable economy.

I am grateful to the Royal Society of Chemistry for its support. The Bill would establish a national science strategy, spearheaded by a strategy council to monitor sustainable funding, which would increase in real terms over 10 years. It would consult relevant scientific organisations, advise the Secretary of State and ensure that there is a national programme for research and development in science, technology, engineering and medicine. The body should report to Parliament and could address the problems of education and training across the whole system.

Among the problems that the council could consider are the training of science graduates and postgraduates, the medical school curriculum—which desperately needs reform—continuing education and science in our primary and secondary schools. A holistic approach to science and technology is essential if we are to produce a work force capable of thriving in a high-tech world. It would replace the reactive mechanisms that we employ in government now that seek solutions for each problem as it comes along.

We would do well to remember that public support for science and the investment required in it is a function of how well we can explain to the public why science is

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

important in the contributions that it makes to economic development and to improving the quality of our lives. It is vital for the whole scientific community to begin to communicate effectively to the public the value and applicability of their research.

In the words of Harold Varmus, the director of the United States National Institute of Health, we must concentrate on

"the destinations of science, the answers, the miracles, the cures",

and not get bogged down in talking too deeply about the journey itself. If we are to maximise the benefits that we get from the exciting scientific developments taking place today, scientists will have to talk about the destinations and benefits of science. Varmus represents in the United States what I think that we need in this country: a voice for the long-term benefits in science and medicine, achieved by investing heavily in basic science.

As we move into a world of e-commerce, the intensification of information technology and the human genome project with its potential to revolutionise medicine, the call for a focused strategy, a sustainable resource flow and the doubling of the science budget becomes deafening. The Bill recognises the explosion in science and technology and seeks to address its importance by creating a structure for a national science strategy to take us into the next century and deliver the benefits in a co-ordinated manner that the public can understand.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Dr. Ian Gibson, Ms Judith Church, Dr. Michael Clark, Mr. Nigel Jones, Mr. Anthony D. Wright, Mr. Ivan Henderson, Dr. Ashok Kumar, Dr. Doug Naysmith, Mr. Tony Clarke, Mr. Hilary Benn, Dr. Desmond Turner and Dr. Brian Iddon.

NATIONAL SCIENCE STRATEGY

Dr. Ian Gibson accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the establishment of a national science strategy; to create a National Science Strategy Council to monitor levels of funding, to consult scientific organisations and to advise the Secretary of State; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 November, and to be printed [Bill 165].

Orders of the Day

Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill

Lords amendments further considered.

New Clause

Lords amendment in lieu of Lords amendment No. 20: No. 20B, after clause 18, to insert the following new clause—*War pensions for widows: entitlement—*

(" .—(1) Subject to subsection (2), a widow in receipt of a widow's pension under any of the enactments mentioned in subsection (3) ("the DSS pension") and in receipt of a pension paid under the Armed Forces Pension scheme shall on remarriage or when living together as husband and wife with a member of the opposite sex only retain the Forces Family Pension (attributable).

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to a widow in receipt of a basic pension under section 44 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992; and a widow in receipt of such a pension who has remarried or is living together as husband and wife with a member of the opposite sex may not retain the Forces Family Pension (attributable).

(3) The enactments referred to in subsection (1) are—

(a) the Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983, and any order re-enacting the provisions of that order,

(b) the Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme 1983, and any subsequent scheme made under the Personal Injuries (Emergency Provisions) Act 1939,

(c) any scheme made under the Pensions (Navy, Army, Air Force and Mercantile Marine) Act 1939 or the Polish Resettlement Act 1947 applying the provisions of any such order as is referred to in paragraph (a),

(d) the order made under section 1(5) of the Ulster Defence Regiment Act 1969 concerning pensions and other grants in respect of disablement or death due to service in the Ulster Defence Regiment.")

5.59 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I must draw the attention of the House to the fact that the House's financial privileges are involved in all four Lords amendments for consideration today, which is to say Lords amendments Nos. 20B, 42D, 43E and 43F. If the House were to agree to any of those Lords amendments, I would ensure that the appropriate entry was made in the *Journal*.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Last week, the Minister of State mentioned the Parliament Act 1911 and said:

"That legislation can be used to push a Bill through the House on a fast-track basis only if the Bill takes the same form as it took when it was introduced . . . The reality, as the Clerks will confirm, is that the Parliament Act cannot be used to push through the amended Bill."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1999; Vol. 337, c. 332.]

I have discussed that with the Clerk at the Table and the Clerk of the House. It will not surprise hon. Members to learn that it is a complicated matter. However, it appears that the Bill could pass amended if the Lords amendments were agreed. Could you clarify that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have listened with interest to the argument put to me. Madam Speaker is charged under

the Parliament Acts with the duty of giving certificates on whether the procedures of the Acts may be applied to particular Bills. I do not wish to anticipate any future decisions that she may have to take in that regard. In the meantime, Members might like to consult pages 569 and 570 of "Erskine May".

Mr. Rooker: I will keep my remarks brief because there is a guillotine on all four amendments. Lords amendment No. 20B refers to our debate last week on war widows.

The amendment that the Lords have placed before us today, as they are fully entitled to do, is a modified version of the amendment that the House voted to overturn last week to allow forces widows whose husbands' death was due to service to keep occupational pensions for life. The new amendment restricts the change further by excluding those widows in receipt of a category A state retirement pension—in other words those with a retirement pension in their own right, who by definition would probably have been working for at least 10 years to receive that pension.

6 pm

In a week like this week, we obviously recognise that we have to look after the widows of those who died as a result of service, but I repeat what I said last week. The matter is under inquiry and review by the Ministry of Defence and it is not appropriate to place the amendment in the Bill. I do not defend the argument on cost grounds, although I gave the House a series of costs last week that could escalate as a knock-on effect of the amendment.

Last week, in answer to a specific question from my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) at column 389 of *Hansard*, I said that the amendment would cost the MOD less than £15 million annually. I say to my hon. Friend, whom I see in his place, that the cost of the amendment would actually be a good deal less than that. One has to be careful about the kind of cohort with which one is dealing. I give a rough figure, but we cannot be held to it. If future and current widows affected by the amendment were taken into account, the cost would be about £3 million. That would not include those who have already remarried. I must, however, be very precise about the general figures at issue.

I quoted other knock-on figures last week for the public sector which I will not repeat tonight because they are on the record and they stand. However, I wanted to put that extra figure from the MOD on the record so that we could see the amount in relation to the group of widows in question. That is important.

Hon. Members are fully entitled to make representations to the MOD. I confirm to the House that I have kept the commitment that I gave to the House last week. I have made the most urgent and vigorous representations to my right hon. Friend as a result of the debate. I did more than send him a copy of *Hansard*. I wrote to him and even added my own postscript to the letter. I registered the mood from both sides of the House. With respect, I think that the other place also did that because the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman there said that the figures had been placed on the record and the Government could be held accountable to them. Indeed, those on the Opposition Front Bench did not vote on the matter and in the subsequent Division the majority was somewhat less than before. I hope that the House does not wish to divide on the amendment tonight and that it will accept my motion.

The matter is being given serious consideration. The MOD will publish the review by next summer and it will be available for full public consultation. I accept that I cannot answer on the reasons for the delay, but since my speech last week it has been reaffirmed in the other place by my right hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, on the say-so of my noble Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement, that the report will be published by next summer. There will then be full public consultation. We are not dismissing the issue without fair consideration. We do not dismiss the amendment on cost grounds alone. Who would dismiss it on a perfunctory £3 million, which is all that is involved for this narrow cohort? There are, however, other considerations to take into account. It is right that we should do that and not accept the amendment.

Both Houses of Parliament will have an opportunity within a relatively short period following a consultation to come to a conclusion, so I hope that the House will accept the motion that I have put before it tonight.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I want to speak, albeit briefly, in support of the Lords amendment, which is a great modification on the original. It tightens still further the ring fence around the group of war widows represented so well by the War Widows Association of Great Britain. Let us be clear that we are talking about post-1973 widows of service men who die or are killed in the line of duty while still serving. Moreover, we are talking only about those who might decide to remarry. The new Lords amendment further defines the group by excluding all widows in receipt of the basic state pension—those over 60 years of age.

The service community as a whole and, I think, the general public, recognise that war widows are a special case. War widows just over 60 are now prepared to take themselves out of the group in order to focus attention where it is most desperately needed—on the younger widows, especially those with children who, by definition, do not have fathers.

I think it is fair to say that when we debated the matter less than a week ago, the Minister was not as well briefed as he would have liked to have been. He promised that he would hotfoot it to the MOD and make urgent representations, and I am glad to know that he has. That is what I would have expected of him. I am sure that he, too, will have reached the view that we are dealing with a special case. We are probably talking about only hundreds of widows out of the maximum 2,500 that we discussed before.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Like most of my hon. Friends, I followed the discussion yesterday in another place with great interest. The hon. Gentleman will recall that the spokeswoman for his party accepted the assurances given by the Minister and said that she would not push the matter and would not ask this House to discuss it. What has changed since yesterday in the minds of the Conservative Front-Bench team in this place?

Mr. Trend: I do not accept that there has been a change of mind between the two teams. This is the first time that

[Mr. Trend]

the House of Commons has had a chance to debate and take a view on the new amendment. It clarifies in an important way the most important feature, which is the ring fence. If the ring fence is solid and in place and if the Government are determined to keep to it, it is sufficient.

We all agree that our service men and women are unique among people in the public service. They cannot join a trades union; they do not get paid overtime; they are excluded from the maximum working hours legislation. They are on duty round the clock. They have long-term contracts of a sort that do not exist elsewhere in the public service. They are posted throughout the world with great disruption to their family life, whether they are in front-line positions overseas or in barracks, preparing for combat. They are the only group of people who are sent on service knowing full well that they should not assume that they will return alive. We cannot, however, take them for granted.

As the Minister knows, there is a real problem with the recruitment and retention of service men and women. In the past few days the Minister will also have been warned of the supposed knock-on effect of the amendment. As I have told the House before, that effect simply need not occur if the Government find the will to ring-fence the war widows. If, even at this stage, further tightening amendments can be found which will help to achieve that ring fencing, the Government will have our full support in speeding them through Parliament.

The Minister has referred to the supposed costs. None of us can be sure about the cost because we do not know how many widows will choose to remarry. All those widows who remarry will save the Exchequer roughly £4,500 by relinquishing their DSS pension. That will be a net gain, and should be recognised as such in the overall calculations. I hope that the Minister will hotfoot it again to the Treasury to show how minuscule the figures are.

I am disappointed that the Minister's journey round the Departments has hardened his heart. On the Conservative Benches there are many who dealt with the matter when we were in government. They have to this day a deep regret that they did not overcome departmental obstinacy on this most deserving group of people. The Minister must not hide behind departmental reviews. There have been many in the past and they have all agreed that the war widows should retain their armed forces pension if they remarry. I can tell that the Minister has reached that view privately. I profoundly hope that he will not find himself one day regretting that he left it too late to do anything about it. I intend to divide the House on the matter to show our strength of feeling and that the campaign will continue.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I shall vote with the Government on this amendment. I understand perfectly the difficulties and complexities of the figures. I do not blame my hon. Friend the Minister of State in any way; indeed, I thank him for making inquiries. However, the point about the Ministry of Defence waiting until next summer is nonsense. If the MOD can make up its mind so quickly—as was done at Rambouillet in a matter of hours—to bomb the hell out of Serbia—

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Keep to the subject.

Mr. Dalyell: This is very much the subject. If the same expedition were to be shown in this matter as in some others, it could be dealt with far more quickly than next summer. It could be dealt with by Christmas.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Like the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), I detect a scintilla of inconsistency in the position of Conservative spokesmen. The last time that we discussed this matter in this place, the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) was proud to announce his conversion, but it did not seem to have been communicated to his colleagues in another place. However, a double conversion is all the more welcome and I am grateful for it. At least the Liberal Democrats have been wholly consistent.

I shall not detain the House by repeating arguments that were adequately made on a previous occasion. As some Members have pointed out, the amendment has been slightly tightened since our previous discussions of the matter. It modernises the position and, most important, it is right. It would save money for the Exchequer, although we cannot prove it through financial forecasts. It does not set a precedent, but I have no intention of reciting a limerick to prove it, as did my noble Friend the Earl Russell in another place. The people who serve in our armed services and are killed in that capacity are a very special group. The measure will have the additional benefit of improving recruitment and retention. That too is important for the MOD.

Other hon. Members have pointed out that this week is an especially poignant one in which to discuss this subject—as we wear poppies in our lapels, two days away from the 11th day of the 11th month. I hope that we shall send the particular message to service men and women and their families that not only do we remember those who have fought, but we realise the sacrifices that the forces make every day.

I respect the Minister of State, who has approached the subject with his customary courtesy and integrity. I am grateful to him for his observations, although I am slightly saddened by the fact that no Minister from the MOD was able to spare two minutes to attend the debate—unlike what happened when the matter was debated in the other place. I hope that the House will show its firm intention and that the point will be made this evening.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): On the last occasion we discussed this matter—albeit under a slightly different measure—I voted with the Opposition. The arguments made by the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats at that time and tonight are correct, but, as the Opposition spokesmen in the Lords have accepted the assurances of my hon. Friend the Minister of State that it is unreasonable to press the matter to a vote, I cannot join the Opposition in the Division Lobby tonight.

I raise two issues with my hon. Friend. First, he states that the measures can be dealt with properly and fully in a review. He has given sufficient commitment to show that he has considered the arguments made in this place and that he considers that the matter is serious and that it should be dealt with in the review. However, if there is a manifest defect, it could be put right by the measure before us. It would thus be open to the Government to accept the proposal, which is a compromise compared to the measure that we debated previously.

Secondly, my hon. Friend argued that his case was not made solely on ground of cost. However, the reason that the Commons gave to the Lords for not accepting the Lords measure was based purely on cost. Although some unfortunate inconsistencies remain, I shall not, however, join Opposition Members in the Division Lobby.

6.15 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I note that this evening, like last week, the Minister cannot begin to defend the way in which he invites his colleagues to vote on the ground that it is right.

We have the promise of a review by next summer. However, for the Ministry of Defence, "by next summer" is a somewhat flexible concept. I should be much happier if we had a date, rather than a season, for the review. We should not overturn the Lords amendment on the grounds that the findings of a review will be published at some time in the future, and that there will then be a lengthy consultation period. Even if the war widows measure were included in that review, and it would be appalling and a scandal if it were not, widows and their children would have to wait all that time before they could make sense of their future status—to remarry, to have fathers for their children.

We should not ask war widows to wait any longer. In this week of all weeks, when we are about to attend remembrance parades, it is wholly wrong to expect them to continue the sacrifice that their husbands have already made. In another place, the Baroness Strange stated that the matter was honourable and right. It is honourable and right for us to support the Lords amendment.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I am more than happy to support the Government, although I share the reservations voiced by my hon. and old Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) about the length of the review process.

Tonight, we have rightly paid tribute to our service men and women—to their bravery, stoicism, fortitude, gallantry and loyalty. The Minister may criticise me for my sloppy research, but will the position of the widows of Gurkha soldiers be included in the review? All the tributes that have been paid to our service men and women must also embrace the bravery and courage of that remarkable band of men, who are currently showing us what fine, brave soldiers they are. Will the position of their widows be part of the review?

Mr. Rooker: I do not have a direct answer for my hon. Friend, as I speak on behalf of the Secretary of State for Defence. However, "I sincerely hope so" is the answer that I give my hon. Friend. The MOD will conduct a full review. It is one of four Departments currently reviewing their pension schemes.

I understand the points made by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), and recognise the expertise with which he speaks, as he was formerly a special adviser to the Ministry of Defence. The matter is a sensitive one. Members of the other place accepted that the review was genuine and that the date was a season—the summer. That is the best date which I could obtain from my colleagues at the MOD; there will be time to put pressure on them to be more specific. However, there will be a full consultation.

This issue will not go away. I have been as open as I possibly can with the House about the figures. It is not a monetary issue. I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) that, if the House overturns the amendment and sends back a message to the Lords, the message will be couched in the language of public finances, because that is the prerogative of this House. However, those are not the reasons that I use to advance my argument for resisting the amendment, although the nature of the exchange of messages between the two Houses is such that such language must be used. I would not want hon. Members to think that, because the message will refer to public finances, the Government rest our case on public finances—we do not.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 361, Noes 178.

Division No. 311] **[6.20 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtle-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John

Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Jacqui Lait and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Clause 57

INCAPACITY BENEFIT: RESTRICTION TO RECENT CONTRIBUTORS

Lords amendment in lieu of Government amendment No. 42A: No. 42D, in page 66, line 4, leave out ("two") and insert ("seven")

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move, That this House insists on its amendment No. 42A to the words restored to the Bill and disagrees with the Lords in their amendment No. 42D in lieu.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 43E and motion to disagree, and 43F and motion to disagree.

Mr. Darling: There are two issues before us tonight in what will be, of necessity, a fairly short debate. The first is the Lords amendments on incapacity benefit, and the second is the issue of the whole Bill.

First, in relation to incapacity benefit amendments passed by the Lords, we discussed almost the same amendments at great length last week—after a lengthy debate previously, both in Committee upstairs and on the Floor of the House.

I said at the end of Commons Report last May that I would listen to detailed amendments. I did do so, and last week, in response to what had been said in the Lords, I made two substantial changes to the original proposals on the pension threshold and the contribution conditions, which were accepted by the House. I made it clear then, I made it clear outside the House at the weekend and I make it clear tonight that the Government do not propose any more changes; there are no more changes to come.

The House of Lords has a clear duty to revise legislation proposed by the Government and passed by this House, but the time has come for the Lords to accept that the will of the elected Chamber must take precedence.

I accept that, both in the other place and in this place, there are many hon. Members who are entitled to put a counter-view—to advance their arguments—and they have done so with vigour. However, the time does come when the House needs to take a considered view on the whole Bill, because that is what we are now talking about, and I hope that it will now do so.

I notice that in the other place Government support was up, and many people who previously could not support the Government felt able to do so. I hope that hon. Members will take account of that and can now support the Government.

The Lords amendments would have a significant financial effect. That means that there is an issue of privilege. There is a convention that the role of the Lords

[Mr. Darling]

in financial matters is to agree, not initiate or amend. I trust that the House will note that.

The Bill will help millions of people who will be denied help unless it passes into law. I take this opportunity to set out clearly what we are doing for disabled people because it bears repetition. We are investing more in helping disabled children by increasing benefits. There will be an extra £37 a week for severely disabled three and four-year-olds, and there will be up to £26 more for people disabled at birth or from an early age. Both those measures are in the Bill, and neither would be here but for this Government.

There is a new disability income guarantee—up to £5 more a week for single disabled people and £8 for couples. There will be £140 million to help carers with desperately needed respite care. In addition, £195 million will be invested in the new deal for disabled people. The disabled person's tax credit will be worth at least £155 a week for a single person. We are spending more to extend the linking rules, for people on incapacity benefit, from eight weeks to a year so that they can try out work without losing benefit entitlement.

In the longer term, we are spending £7 billion more to give new pension rights to carers and disabled people with broken work records—help that was never ever there in the past and would never ever be there under a Tory Government. My hon. Friends must remember that when they consider who wants to try to support some of them tonight.

We have driven forward the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and we have established the Disability Rights Commission—something that the Tories blocked when they were in government.

All those measures are a mark of a Government committed to fairness and opportunity for disabled people. As I said last week, in the two short years that we have been in government we have done more to help disabled people than the Conservatives did in 18 years, and people need to remember that when they vote against us tonight. We have more to do, but we have made a start.

I am also told—we got a flavour of this earlier from the Conservatives—that it will not matter if the Bill falls and they get their way. This Bill will benefit millions of people. It increases opportunity: it provides the opportunity of stakeholder pensions for 5 million people who, at the moment, are denied the opportunity to save for their retirement; it sets up the new ONE service, bringing together the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency—something that is long overdue—giving every claimant the opportunity to make the most of their potential with the help of a personal adviser; and it replaces the all-work test with a personal capability assessment, which focuses on what a person can do, not only on what he cannot.

The Bill promotes fairness. For the first time, it extends bereavement allowances to fathers who lose their wife and are left to bring up children on their own—something that the Conservative party never did anything about. It doubles the lump sum—up to £2,000—received by people who lose their husband or wife. It enables pension sharing on divorce, helping about 50,000 people, mostly women, every year—something that the Conservative party never did.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Will the Secretary of State now address the amendment and the arguments advanced in the other place?

Mr. Darling: I am addressing the amendment, as well as viewing the Bill as a whole. I am making it particularly clear to the House that what is at stake is significant extra help for disabled people—significant extra help for millions of people, which the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues blocked for year after year after year.

We have a record to be proud of, not only in the help that we are giving disabled people but in the help that we are giving on pensions, the extra bereavement help, and pension sharing on divorce—all essential welfare reform, which people have wanted for years. The Bill delivers it. I make that point because a colleague of the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) talked glibly about it being all right if the Bill was lost, saying that it would not really matter. Millions of people stand to gain from the Bill, including those in the greatest need.

I repeat, because the point bears repetition, that we are giving £26 a week more to people who at the moment get so little that they are on income support for the rest of their life—something that the hon. Member for Gainsborough and his colleagues did nothing about in the 18 years in which they had the opportunity to do so.

The Bill also gives more money to expectant mothers who until now have been denied maternity benefits. The Conservative view may be that that does not matter, but it matters to the 14,000 people who will benefit. All those measures will fall by the wayside if the Bill is delayed or blocked.

I always expected Tory opposition to these measures. The Tories are settling well into opposition—they are clearly preparing for years of it. Their opportunism sometimes beggars belief. I find it difficult to take seriously a party that claims to be concerned about disabled people's rights when it blocked the disability rights Bills in the previous Parliament. The Conservative party is committed to ending the new deal for disabled people; it is committed to ending the working families tax credit, which will mean an effective tax rise of £24 a week for some of the poorest people; and it is opposed to all the increased spending on those who need it.

Conservative Members oppose our pension reform because they want to privatise the lot. The party is determined, as we heard again this afternoon, to slash social security spending, yet at the same time it backed amendments in another place that would cost £4 billion.

The Tory Opposition are opportunist; they are opposing the Bill not because they are concerned about disabled people, but because they see a chance of opposition for its own sake.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Would the right hon. Gentleman say that Baroness Kennedy was an opportunist Conservative? After all, she said:

"What is happening to our values? Are we forgetting who we are? What does 'social justice' really mean?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 November 1999; Vol. 606, c. 1196.]

Mr. Darling: No, but I note that Baroness Kennedy abstained after having said that. I accept, as I said earlier,

that some of my colleagues have expressed reservations, as they are entitled to do. I have said before, and I say again—we have listened and we have moved. I believe that these reforms are fully justified: they do far more to help the severely disabled than has been done in the past, they bring the benefit system up to date and they take account of the fact that things have moved on in the past 50 years.

The Bill provides extra help for pensions, and pension sharing on divorce and bereavement benefits; it provides more help for people to get into work and more help for the severely disabled. The Bill needs to be supported. The improvements that we are making to the benefits system will help those who need it most. We want to help disabled people and to end child poverty in a generation. We want to improve conditions for disabled children facing poverty, to get their parents into work and to give everybody a real chance to get on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have allowed the Secretary of State to go on a little, but I remind him that there is very little time and that the amendment is specifically about incapacity benefit.

Mr. Darling: I fully accept that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, although I appreciate everything that you say, I am entitled to take account of what I anticipate will be said about the Bill.

The amendments on incapacity benefit that we introduced last week are, I believe, fully justified. They showed that the Government have listened and made changes. There are no more changes to come. The Bill as a whole is a major step forward; it provides far greater opportunity and fairness than ever before. On that basis, I ask the House to support us in getting the Bill on to the statute book.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): There is no point in the Secretary of State getting quite so het up, and certainly not at such length. I will try to speak briefly so that the many right hon. and hon. Members who have already participated in the debate can, I hope, speak again.

This debate is not about a Third Reading of a Bill; it is about a very specific set of amendments on which the House has not previously had an opportunity to vote. Some Labour Members may not have felt able to vote on the previous amendment to remove the means test entirely, but may believe that this amendment provides an opportunity to consider a compromise. Lord Ashley proposes having a means test that starts at a rather high level that rests on the Government's arguments about the minimum levels of income on which disabled people are expected to live.

6.45 pm

The Secretary of State referred to the Government's increased support in the House of Lords. Before we get carried away, I remind him that the Contents—that is, those who voted for the amendment and therefore opposed the Government—were 260, and the Not Contents were 127. That hardly counts as a massive surge of support for the Government. Of course, the vote would have been lost on a vote of life peers alone—it had nothing to do with hereditary peers.

The fact is that the Bill is a muddle. While it professes to encourage people to save, this provision will penalise people for saving. While it claims to reinforce the contributory principle, this provision attacks the contributory principle. I am afraid that although the Secretary of State may well be proud of parts of the Bill, I very much doubt that he is proud of the measure that he is trying to push through the House tonight. There is no argument for penalising disabled people simply because they have had the prudence to take out an occupational pension. There is no reason why they should face a marginal tax and benefit withdrawal rate of 73 per cent. There is no argument for the weakening of the national insurance contributory principle, which is contained in these proposals.

The only reason the House is still wrestling with the amendment at this late stage is because of the Secretary of State's catalogue of misjudgments. There was no reason for us to have got into these arguments; it was perfectly obvious from the beginning that compromise was necessary on this issue. The Secretary of State was more preoccupied with his macho image than with good social security policy. That is why we shall be opposing the motion.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): My right hon. Friend said in moving the motion that there were two issues before the House—the amendment and the Bill. There is also a third issue—the relationship of the House of Commons to the House of Lords. After three considerations of the Bill, anybody who votes against the Government tonight is voting for the House to Lords to prevail over the House of Commons. That is what this is about.

The Bill has come back to the House of Commons twice, and all hon. Members have had the right to vote on it. But this is the end of a parliamentary Session, and we had better be clear that the Labour party believes that the House of Commons shall have primacy over the House of Lords. Anybody who votes to scupper this measure will be voting for the House of Lords to prevail over the House of Commons. I go further: anybody who votes for this amendment will be voting on the same side as two dukes, 28 earls, 22 viscounts and Andrew Lloyd-Webber. Not only will they be voting for the last hurrah of the hereditaries, but they are asserting, if the House of Lords is allowed to have primacy over the House of Commons, that a reformed House of Lords, which is sure to be more democratic than the current one, will have an even greater claim to primacy over the House of Commons.

Audrey Wise (Preston): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that it is possible that we will vote on the merits of the case?

Mr. Kaufman: My hon. Friend may do that, but she has been elected to reform the House of Lords—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes, the wording of the motion is that this House insists. Anybody voting against the Government on this motion will be voting for the supremacy of the House of Lords. A reformed House of Lords will say that if the House of Commons was ready to cave in to the hereditaries, we, who are much more democratic, can have our way. My hon. Friend, who has an honourable and consistent record of voting against Labour Governments throughout her years in the House

[Mr. Kaufman]

of Commons, should accept that an elected Government should have their way over the Lords. Vote for democracy.

Mr. Webb: If I followed the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) correctly, he said that if the House voted in favour of the Ashley amendment—the less severe means test—we would, although that would be the will of the House, be being subservient to the House of Lords. We would not; we would be expressing the will of the House of Commons.

The two key issues before us are the threshold and the rate at which the means test tapers in. The Secretary of State has given no concession whatever on the taper. It was 50 per cent. on the day that he drafted the Bill, and it is 50 per cent. now. This is our first chance to vote in favour of a 23 per cent. taper.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: There are only eight minutes left for other speeches so I shall not.

The second issue is the threshold. The amendment ties the threshold to the disability income guarantee, which has the huge advantage that it is indexed every year. The Secretary of State and the Minister of State were evasive last week on indexation. The sum of £85 has been specified in the Bill, but it could quickly be eroded. Linking the sum to the disability income guarantee would ensure indexation, providing safety for the future. That is why the Liberal Democrats will oppose the Government.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I support the Lords amendment tabled by Lord Ashley, principally because the Government's proposals would leave 310,000 disabled people who are unable to work without incapacity benefit or with reduced benefit. The vast majority of those people are already on low incomes. They do not slip on to incapacity benefit. They are judged unfit for work following a medical test set out by the Government of the day.

Like many others, I have long argued for a compromise that would protect disabled people who are unable to work and on the lowest incomes. A threshold fixed at the disability income guarantee of £128 would be fairer. A taper not of 50 per cent. but at the rate of the standard rate of income tax—23 per cent.—would be fairer.

Finally, I am not opposed to welfare reform. I am a strong supporter of it, and have been for a long time. I can even offer documentary evidence to prove that. Let me end with the words of Baroness Kennedy, who said yesterday in the other place:

"I believe in welfare reform, but I also believe in welfare."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 November 1999; Vol. 606, c. 1196.]

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Secretary of State urged us to take a counter-view where appropriate. The Opposition have struck a chord with the country at large, which is why I support the Ashley amendment. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation study highlights determined accusations that the Secretary of State and the Government in general are guilty of age discrimination, particularly for people aged between 45 and the early 60s. Those people will be incrementally damaged by the Secretary of State's disagreement with the Lords amendment. They have poorer prospects than others, and their prospects of finding alternative employment reduce as their ages rise. The Secretary of State has specifically targeted that category of people, and I must disagree with him. I shall vote for the Lords amendment.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): What is this debate all about? Incapacity benefit, people tell me. But incapacity benefit is basically ensconced in a Bill that tries to provide work for those who can and help for those who cannot. I have not found a single Member on the Labour Benches, and none too many on the Opposition Benches either, who disagrees with that principle.

The initial problem with the Bill was that a group of people fell into the middle—it was not clear whether they could work or needed our help. Trying to determine into which category people fall has been difficult. I did not support the Bill the last time it came before us because I did not believe that the Secretary of State and his Ministers had properly worked through that difficulty. However, over six months, case after case in the middle band has been produced—some people have rheumatoid arthritis, or myalgic encephalomyelitis. The Bill has been adjusted to meet many difficult conditions.

One difficult case remains—that of people who have taken early retirement and who have an occupational pension. Each of us has constituents in that category. For example, a teacher, after years of teaching, may be unable to bear going into a classroom to face the kids; or an air traffic controller may see a screen no longer filled with different planes, but with a jumble. Those people may retire from their jobs.

The Conservatives reacted to such people by saying that if they could do their own jobs, they could take incapacity benefit for the short term. The Tories had a problem with employing those people ever again and were damn well never going to give them any help, so people were left to rot. The Labour Government say that such people may no longer be able to teach, but they can still do something. We will help them to find those jobs and to get benefits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), whom I greatly respect, has referred to that idea as invalidity benefit. It is not so. The benefit is given to people who are told that they can do no work at all. If that is true, the people involved are invalids, and a whole host of things will be done to help, support and protect—

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to the Order.*

Question put, That this House insists on its amendment No. 42A to the words restored to the Bill and disagrees with the Lords in their amendment No. 42D in lieu:—

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 234.

Division No. 312] **[6.57 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don

Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dobbin, Jim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones. Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Jacqui Lait and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment agreed to and Lords amendment in lieu disagreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Clause 58

INCAPACITY BENEFIT: REDUCTION FOR PENSION PAYMENTS

Lords amendment: No. 43E, in line 12, leave out ("50 per cent.") and insert

("the standard rate percentage of income tax")

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 234.

Division No. 313] **[7.11 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*

Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dobbin, Jim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Jacqui Lait and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 43F, in line 15, leave out ("£85") and insert

("the level of the Disability Income Guarantee")

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

7.24 pm

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 232.

Division No. 314] **[7.24 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Church, Ms Judith
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Ramsell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha

Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradly, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dobbin, Jim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paige, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*

Wills, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Jacqui Lait and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments Nos. 20B, 42D, 43E and 43F and for insisting on the amendment No. 42A: Mr. Richard Burden, Mr. Kevin Hughes, Mrs. Eleanor Laing, Mr. Eric Pickles and Mr. Jeff Rooker to be members of the Committee; Mr. Jeff Rooker to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments and for insisting on one Commons amendment reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

7.37 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that under the terms of the timetable motion that we are about to consider, only amendments proposed by a Minister of the Crown may be voted on, and that amendments that might be voted on but are proposed by Government or Opposition Back Benchers will be excluded, with the effect that the motion limits not only the length of the debate but what we may debate in the following hours?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): It is not a matter for the Chair to rule on the content of a timetable motion before the House. A motion will be moved and hon. Members will then have the opportunity to comment on the content of the particular motion before the House, so there is time for that debate.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there any precedent of which you are aware for a guillotine motion not only to curtail the length of a debate but to seek to constrain—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The short answer is probably "plenty", but that is a matter for the debate.

Immigration and Asylum Bill (Supplemental Allocation of Time)

7.38 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move,

That the Order of the House [15th June] be supplemented as follows:

Lords Amendments

1.—(1) Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion five hours after the commencement of proceedings on this Order.

(2) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order: No. 135, Nos. 1 to 134 and Nos. 136 to 369.

(3) Proceedings on Lords Amendment No. 135 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill.

2.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing the proceedings on Amendment No. 135 to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1(3).

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(3) If that Question is for the amendment of the Lords Amendment, the Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on the Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

3.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1(1).

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(3) If that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, the Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any further Amendment of the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

(4) The Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in their Amendment as amended.

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in a Lords Amendment.

(6) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(7) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments, or disposed of an Amendment relevant to a Lords Amendment which has been disagreed to, the Speaker shall put forthwith a single Question on any Amendments moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to the Lords Amendment.

Subsequent stages

4.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(3) Sub-paragraphs (4) to (7) apply for the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion.

(4) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair.

(6) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on any item.

(7) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Reasons Committee

5. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

6.—(1) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

(2) Proceedings in the Committee shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion 30 minutes after their commencement.

(3) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with sub-paragraph (2) the Chairman shall—

(a) first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and has not yet been decided; and

(b) then put forthwith successively Questions on motions which may be made by a Minister of the Crown for assigning a Reason for disagreeing with the Lords in any of their Amendments.

(4) The proceedings of the Committee shall be reported without any further Question being put.

Miscellaneous

7. If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the expiry of the period at the end of which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

8.—(1) In this paragraph "the proceedings" means proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments, on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill, on the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the Report of such a Committee.

(2) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(3) The proceedings shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(4) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, the proceedings shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

9. If proceedings on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House would, by virtue of Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration), commence at a time when proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies are in progress, proceedings on the Motion shall be postponed to the conclusion of those proceedings.

The Bill has been subject to more sustained, detailed scrutiny than any similar Bill in living memory. We published a White Paper in July 1998, and earlier this year we committed the Bill to a Special Standing Committee—a procedure of the House that was introduced by the Opposition when they were in government, but which they then allowed to lie fallow and only ever used for minor, relatively non-contentious Bills.

My hon. Friends who were in Parliament before the 1997 general election will recall that, in the autumn of 1995, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, then the Leader of the Opposition, moved that the Asylum and Immigration Bill introduced by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) should be committed to a Special Standing Committee, where it could be properly examined. For reasons best known to Conservative Members—but which I am sure they will have come to regret because of the defects in that Bill—they refused to allow the Bill to be properly scrutinised.

We decided not to follow the errors of the previous Government. The Bill was committed to a Special Standing Committee. There were four weeks of hearings in the Special Standing Committee, which took evidence from a wide variety of groups and spent a total of 93 hours scrutinising the Bill, taking and considering the evidence and engaged in line-by-line examination. Parliament has indeed done its work—or some Members of Parliament, I ought to say, have done their work—on the Bill, and it is a better Bill as a result of that scrutiny and the amendments that we introduced.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I was not leading for our party at the beginning, but I followed the progress of the Bill and I accept the timetable that the Secretary of State lays out. However, if the Bill was so carefully presented by the Government and so carefully considered, why was a major amendment relating to the detention of asylum seekers introduced only in the House of Lords, first on Report and then withdrawn, and reintroduced on Third Reading?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House since January 1983. I remember his by-election well—very cold and depressing it was, too. He has been in the House that long, and he knows well that amendments to Bills can be moved at any stage. If a major piece of legislation is going through Parliament, it is for the Government to respond to changing circumstances if we judge it aright.

It is precisely because of changing circumstances—a substantial increase in the number of asylum seekers that we and many other European countries have received—that we thought it necessary and appropriate to make the changes in the Bill that we have laid down. We have made use of the opportunity.

Mr. Hughes: That is a valid argument, but it means that a significant change to the Bill—amendment No. 1—comes to the House tonight for the first time. It has never been debated by the House. It introduces powers of detention of people in Britain—a serious matter in any context—which the House is entitled to debate. Is not that a sufficient reason for arguing that there should be no guillotine, as that will, by definition, restrict the debate?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is falling into the same error as some of the noble peers in the other place, who thought that the powers to direct people under temporary admission to reside at a particular address were in respect of the detention facilities that are being established at Oakington in Cambridge. That is not the case. Those detention facilities will be run under existing

detention powers. We can debate the merits of the hon. Gentleman's case when the matter is discussed, if the House approves the timetable motion.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I need hardly point out to him that immigration is a reserved matter, but may I remind him that the Bill amends five Scottish Acts of Parliament, all of which fall within the province of the Scottish Parliament? May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that that Parliament may have the power to amend some aspects of the Bill after it becomes law? Will he at least consider the setting up of a concordat so that any conflicts, tensions or anomalies can be dealt with sensibly, in order to maintain a harmonious relationship between this Parliament and the Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Straw: On the main point of principle, as long as we have a United Kingdom—a Union—it is unarguable that matters of immigration and asylum are reserved matters and not devolved. That must be beyond doubt.

Of course I accept my hon. Friend's other point—that to ensure the smooth operation of the procedures and arrangements laid down in the Bill, we should establish arrangements, procedures and concordats with the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament, and with Scottish local authorities and local authorities and other bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Up to now, relations between my Department and the Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament, and between members of that Executive and my fellow Ministers and me, have been close, cordial and constructive, and I intend to ensure that they stay that way. I hope that that is helpful to my hon. Friend.

I referred earlier to the refusal by the then Government to establish a Special Standing Committee on their 1995 Bill and the errors that resulted. One was that they rejected any controls on unscrupulous immigration advisers. The second was that they removed the right to any cash benefits or other vouchers or support for those who were in-country applicants, and consequently were bound to place a huge burden on local authorities in Kent and London. That indeed happened, and the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald is responsible for it.

Why is the guillotine needed? I am glad that Opposition Members asked that question. The guillotine is needed not least in order to put right the shambles left by the 1995 Bill and the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, for which the right hon. Lady was responsible. That is one of the key reasons why the timetable motion is needed, There are many other reasons, which I shall give the right hon. Lady in a moment, why we must get the Bill and the measure through as quickly as possible.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Does not the guillotine in question refer not to a discussion of our Bill or to the earlier stages of this Bill, but to the 367 amendments that the Government have seen fit to table to a Bill that was apparently so well scrutinised? The guillotine applies to those amendments, and so far I have not heard a single reason from the right hon. Gentleman why it should apply.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Lady should hold her breath. I am coming on to one of the amendments that is a source of profound embarrassment to her. She supported an amendment in the other place at a cost of £500 million which reverses a central part of the 1996 Act and would have sustained—

Miss Widdecombe *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: It is no good the right hon. Lady shaking her head in that embarrassed way. We all know the truth. The measure would have sustained a continuation of the burden on the local authorities in Kent. *[Interruption.]* We are not in the least desperate. It is the right hon. Lady who is desperate, as is evident from her volte-face in the course of three weeks in respect of amendment No. 135.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Let me continue to explain—[HON. MEMBERS: "Behind you.] I shall give way in a moment. First I shall explain why we need the timetable motion. We need it because of the profoundly unconstructive approach of the Opposition, which continues. In this House, despite all the opportunities that we gave them, the Opposition made no constructive suggestions for improving the Bill or tightening controls. In Committee—

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, as he is partly responsible for the shambles that the Opposition made of the Bill. In Committee, the only changes that the Opposition sought to make were not changes strengthening the Bill, but changes weakening the penalties on crooked hauliers and truck drivers with clandestine illegals in the back of their lorries. That is absolutely correct and the record shows it.

In the other place, with the full backing of the right hon. Lady in this House, Conservatives supported what is now amendment No. 135, which would drive a coach and horses through the new asylum support system and the tightening of controls, of which this measure is a key part. That amendment was passed only with Conservative votes.

We shall deal with the detail of the amendment when we come to that debate, but the effect of the new clause contained in amendment No. 135, which the right hon. Lady said she supported, would be to restore cash benefits to those from whom the Conservatives—the right hon. Lady—withdrew them in 1996. The result of that, as she and the people of Kent know very well, is the restoration of cash benefits for those from whom—

Miss Widdecombe *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Lady says no, but that is exactly the effect of the amendment, as she knows. The result would be to suck in thousands more illegal and unfounded asylum seekers at a cost of at least £500 million a year.

We all know that the right hon. Lady is deeply embarrassed by that, and the question for her tonight—it is one reason why we have this timetable motion—

[Mr. Straw]

is whether she will stand by her statement only two weeks ago that the amendment was sensible and common sense and was supported by the Opposition.

Ms Abbott: I do not wish to detain the House at this point, nor do I wish to interrupt my right hon. Friend's fun in scoring points off the Opposition, but amendment No. 135, to which he has just referred, places no burden, financial or otherwise, on anyone if the Government meet the time targets that the House and, repeatedly, the Committee were told that they would meet.

Mr. Straw: I am sorry to have to say this to my hon. Friend, but she is wrong about that. If she bothers to read chapter eight of the White Paper, or what I and my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State have said from the Front Bench on the issue, she will see that at no stage was it said that there would be a link between the introduction of the new asylum support system in April 2000 and the achievement of the target of the two months plus four months which we said that we aimed to meet for most, although not all, applicants by April 2001.

We have already made a substantial concession to those who, for reasons I fully understand, were concerned about the position of asylum seekers who were families with children. We have made it clear that we will not introduce the new support arrangements for those groups until the two plus four arrangements and targets have been met for most of those groups. That is an undertaking that I am happy to repeat, but the basis of my hon. Friend's point is wrong.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Much of the debate so far has been on the Bill's merits. This is a timetable motion and hon. Members and the right hon. Gentleman should confine their remarks to that.

Mr. Clappison: I take issue with what the right hon. Gentleman has said so far in such a partisan way. If the Opposition's conduct was as he described, why, in a written answer, did he thank all hon. Members who took part in the Committee, including the Opposition, for the careful way in which they had considered the Bill?

Mr. Straw: That does not for a second alter what I said. Can the hon. Gentleman explain to me where he made proposals to strengthen the Bill? If we examine the record, the Opposition spent 14 hours trying to weaken the controls on hauliers. That is the truth, and he knows it.

Mr. Clappison: One example, which the Under-Secretary of State will confirm, concerns clause 45, where we strengthened the arrangements for appeal for people with criminal convictions, for which we were explicitly thanked by the Minister.

Mr. Straw: I wonder how long the Opposition spent on that. They spent 14 hours trying to weaken the controls on hauliers.

The extraordinary U-turns of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members laugh, but they must explain how, in the space of three weeks, the Opposition here and in the other place have gone from supporting amendment No. 135, which restores cash benefits to asylum seekers from whom they withdrew those cash benefits in 1996, to the milk and water amendment that they are now putting forward by way of an alternative. That shows that the right hon. Lady says one thing and does quite another. She has turned once and she intends to turn again. The Government simply will not risk any disruption of our major modernisation of the asylum system as a result of the Opposition's tactics.

There are other reasons why we need the Bill on the statute book by the end of the Session. It improves control; it ensures greater fairness; it bears down heavily on abusive asylum seekers and criminal facilitators, and it takes control of unscrupulous immigration advisers and the avaricious lawyers who often lie behind the abusive asylum seekers.

The right hon. Lady said on the "Today" programme last Friday that the Government had "unstitched" most of the 1996 Act. That is completely untrue. The Bill seeks to make the 1996 Act much more effective, in many cases, by changing it—as, for example, in respect of the white list—in ways which, so far as I understand, never once in Committee, in the House or in the other place did the Opposition speak against or, still less, vote against.

It is well known that Governments of all parties have to resort from time to time to guillotine motions. If the right hon. Lady wishes me to read out a long list of timetable motions to which she put her name or for which she voted I shall be happy to do so. When we had to introduce a timetable motion on 15 June on Report, the right hon. Lady sought to distinguish the Government's record on timetable motions from hers on the curious and eccentric ground that she had never gone in for what she described as double timetable motions; whereas, it was asserted, we had.

Miss Widdecombe: What about this motion?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Lady wants to get off that point because her point was completely false.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With the best will in the world, there are rules and Standing Orders. I know that you are listening carefully, but the Home Secretary has blathered on for a while now without addressing the motion, which is to curtail debate upon the Bill. It is distressing to have such an exchange when many of us wish to speak on the Bill itself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: How much time is taken up on this is a matter for the House and for the orders of the House. I have given one ruling on the content of the debate and the Home Secretary has not strayed from that in the past few moments.

Mr. Straw: I think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would accept that, in speaking on timetable motions, it is in order to explain some of the background to them, which often involves the previous Administration's record on such motions.

This timetable motion is entirely consistent with those which we often had under the previous Administration. I can think of a number of Bills which came back from

the other place with a substantial number of amendments attached to them. There is adequate time to debate the key issues that were raised in the other place. I remind the right hon. Lady, and I shall return to the matter if I reply to the debate, that when she was a member of the previous Government, and before that one of their supporters, that she voted for guillotine motions time without number, whether single or double.

We would have wished to reach an agreement on the Bill's timetable with the Opposition, but given the shambles that the Opposition make of their duties, reaching such agreement was virtually impossible, and that is why I commend the motion to the House.

7.59 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I have heard some inadequate speeches in support of a guillotine motion, but that one reached an all-time low. The Home Secretary has given little reason for a guillotine motion being necessary in our discussion of the amendments before us. It is that guillotine motion and these amendments that we should be addressing, not the past history of guillotine motions or what happened during the Bill's earlier stages.

This guillotine motion is the arrogant motion of an arrogant and incompetent Government. They are, in fact, profoundly embarrassed by what they have done. If they were not, the right hon. Gentleman would have behaved in his usual courteous way. Of 369 amendments, the Government have tabled 367, so it is not the Opposition who seek to impose on the time of the House. To table so many amendments at such a late stage without a single explanatory note is odd enough, but it is even odder because we want to vote on only one amendment. Under normal circumstances, we would have said that that was totally reasonable for a five-hour debate, but the guillotine motion is so constructed that it is virtually impossible to vote on that amendment. That is the essence of my opposition to the motion.

The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has raised the important issue of the Government's preparedness to introduce a system of vouchers. The amendment passed by the other place would prevent the Government from introducing a system of vouchers unless they had already reached their target of six months. We softened that considerably, to spare the—

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall give way when I have finished this point.

We softened our stance considerably, specifically to spare the right hon. Gentleman embarrassment, and tabled amendment (a), which is in the first group. It will not be voted on. It asks the Government to do nothing more than come to the House when they introduce vouchers to give an account of the administrative systems that will underpin them and certify that they will be adequate. That is all it asks them to do.

Mr. Straw: On 26 October, at column 818 of *Hansard*, the right hon. Lady told the House that what is now amendment No. 135 was "supported by us". It was supported by the official Opposition in the House and in the other place. Why has she changed her view?

Miss Widdecombe: Straightforwardly, we believed that it was necessary to call the Government to account for their administrative systems. In the whole of his contribution, my noble Friend Lord Cope, who spoke from our Front Bench in the other place, gave no support to destroying any provisions of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. We made it extremely clear that our reason for supporting an amendment that was supported by Members of all parties—including members of the right hon. Gentleman's party—was to call him to account for his systems. I believe—

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall finish my point. I believe that the amendment we have substituted for it is vastly better—in the spirit of the 1996 Act and of the Bill—and yet, under the guillotine motion, the right hon. Gentleman is not even prepared to put to the vote a suggestion that, when he introduces vouchers, he should do nothing more than come to the House to assure us that the right administrative systems are in place.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Lady mentioned Lord Cope and said that he had not really supported the full effect of amendment No. 135, but it says clearly:

"An asylum-seeker . . . shall be eligible for any social security benefits to which they would have been entitled if"

the 1996 Act had not been in force. His name, on behalf of the official Opposition, was on that amendment. They were not Johnnies-come-lately; they supported the amendment, root and branch, to restore cash benefits to everybody. Why did they do that?

Miss Widdecombe: We made very clear in the other place our reasons for supporting the amendment as the best vehicle available at that time for a cross-party proposal that would force the Government to take note of the concerns of both Houses about the weakness of the administrative systems that will underpin vouchers. That never precluded our trying to do the same thing in a different way when the Bill came to the House. If the right hon. Gentleman does not understand that, he does not understand the ordinary procedures of both Houses.

Perhaps I may return to other aspects of the guillotine motion. We are being asked to pass in a few hours 367 Government amendments, which had to be tabled at this late stage because the Government have not managed to get the Bill right hitherto. They are the same Government who made a complete mess of passport arrangements over the summer—there was unopened mail at Croydon for three months. Are we seriously to believe that they are to be trusted with implementing a highly complex system of vouchers that will apply to new but not existing applicants and be subject to a system of interim arrangements for still other applicants? Are we meant to assume that a Government who cannot even run a passport system or manage a relocation down in Croydon can seriously introduce such a complex system?

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Am I right that the problem with the relocation in Croydon was that the Conservative Government had ordered a computer system and not enough—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I know that that matter has been referred to, but we cannot go into detail when we are discussing the motion.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Lady's comment was utterly erroneous anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because

[Miss Widdecombe]

the computer change was supposed to assist the relocation, not take place simultaneously with it. That is what was supposed to happen—but perhaps I should return to discussing the guillotine motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I underline that hope.

Miss Widdecombe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Specifically on guillotined business, given that the right hon. Lady made the perfectly valid point that amendment (a) will probably not be voted on during the first debate, will she and her colleagues vote with my colleagues against the Government when they try to reverse what the Lords did last week, in order to facilitate such a debate? Will she support us in supporting the Bishop of Southwark's amendment when it is put to the vote?

Miss Widdecombe: No. We believe that our amendment offers the best way of tackling the problem and we wish to vote for it, although under the guillotine motion the Secretary of State has made it quite impossible for us to do so.

The right hon. Gentleman is the one who has performed the U-turns. All through his period in opposition, he bitterly opposed our asylum and immigration legislation, including the 1996 Act, which he now defends as the best thing since sliced bread. He consistently opposed it, calling it a race card. He said that he would reverse it when he came into office. As soon as he did so, he sent out a number of messages. First, he said that he would not implement the so-called white list. Secondly, he said that he would not implement our measures against those who employ illegal immigrants. Thirdly, he said that those who had not had their asylum applications determined—perhaps 20,000 people—might get amnesty. Fourthly, he said that he would reverse some of our highest profile deportation decisions, and on one occasion that even included getting back someone who had already been deported. Fifthly, elsewhere in the immigration system, he said that he would remove the primary purpose rule. Combined, those messages sent out a clear signal to the rest of the world that Britain was a soft touch. By his own figures, he inherited a fall in asylum applications—*[Interruption.]*

I know that the right hon. Gentleman is being briefed, but it would be courteous if he listened. He inherited a 40 per cent. fall in asylum applications, according to his own figures. Since that time, asylum applications have doubled and the backlog has doubled. That is his record in office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Miss Widdecombe: Therefore, the guillotine motion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order—well tried. I have to tell the right hon. Lady that we have moved well into a discussion of merits and have come too far from a debate on allocation of time.

Miss Widdecombe: I feel that the need to crush the time allowed for debate and voting is to cover up the embarrassment that the Government feel at their record on trying to handle asylum applications. That is why the Home Secretary did not even bother to address most of the guillotine motion. He was far too busy not giving reasons why on earth our debate should be limited and we should not be allowed to vote on the one Opposition amendment on which we have sought to vote.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Just for clarity, and following the right hon. Lady's response to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), will she say, yes or no, whether she supports the amendment that was supported by the Conservatives in the House of Lords?

Miss Widdecombe: We are going to support our own amendment if we get half a chance under the guillotine motion to do so. It would be extraordinary if we did anything else.

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I am not giving way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot have two right hon. Members at the Dispatch Box at the same time. I do not think that the right hon. Lady has yet given way.

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed not; every other time that I have given way to the Home Secretary, his confusion has been so painful that I have been embarrassed for him. There is not very much point in giving way to him further.

This is an arrogant motion which denies the Opposition the modest opportunity to vote on a single crucial amendment. It is an incompetent motion because 369 amendments have been tabled and the time allowed to debate them is simply not adequate. It reflects a much greater incompetence, as a result of which so many amendments were necessary at so late a stage—but then, in the Home Secretary's phrase, we must take that as business as usual at the Home Office.

8.12 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I have some concerns with the allocation of time motion, although I have no sympathy whatever with the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), given the guillotines that we suffered over the years of Conservative rule.

I am worried that, because of the timetabling, we shall not reach debate on amendments Nos. 143, 144 to 154 and 163 to 169, which concern the role of local authorities. The implementation of the legislation in Scotland may cause considerable controversy and conflict between the two Parliaments. Similarly, I cannot see how we shall ever reach amendments on exclusion from social security benefits, which begin with amendment No. 172.

Whatever its merits, the Bill is based on the premise of uniformity throughout the United Kingdom. Yet, in Scotland, historically we have had different arrangements from those found south of the border. I have raised the

matter with the Home Secretary before, but I know that I shall not get the chance to voice my concerns in the debate. We should be debating the amendments.

Local authority social work departments in Scotland make cash payments at income support level—not at 70 per cent. of income support—and then reclaim the costs from the Scottish Executive. There is an important point of principle for the Home Office when it seeks to implement the measures north of the border. Despite what the Home Secretary says about consultation between his officials and those of the Scottish Executive and of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, there are very serious concerns.

Immigration is a reserved matter, but much of the practical support given to asylum seekers in Scotland—I am talking about 150 people at the moment, although, in a year, we may be talking about 6,000—comes from councils. Councils' modus operandi is the locus of the Scottish Parliament, not this Parliament.

Mr. Shepherd: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Godman: No, I simply have not time to do so.

Five Scottish Acts of Parliament that deal with devolved matters will be amended by amendments that we shall not have time to discuss. I am making a very important point. I know that Members of the Scottish Parliament and others are deeply concerned—hence my plea to the Home Secretary to consider a concordat in order to maintain a harmonious relationship between the two Parliaments. The secessionists on the Opposition Benches do not want such a relationship, but I do.

Mr. Shepherd: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Godman: I do not have time to do so.

The five Acts are the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978, the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984—

Mr. Shepherd: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With the best will in the world, does the speech of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) not demonstrate the very purpose of the guillotine, which is to deny him the opportunity to raise detailed criticism during the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am obliged to the hon. Member; he anticipates me. I must treat the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) as I did the right hon. Members for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). The hon. Member is straying far too much into detail. I understand his original argument, but he must stick to the question of the allocation of time. He cannot go into such detail.

Dr. Godman: I am exceedingly grateful for your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I drifted, it was because of the intensity of my feelings about the legislation and how it will affect implementation in Scotland. The Government are sailing into dangerous waters. There must be a partnership between the two Parliaments. The Scottish Parliament has not formally debated the measures yet. In fairness to the Home Secretary, he has acknowledged the problems. The Secretary of State for Scotland will have power over the designation question, yet we shall not have the chance to debate that.

If we do not have time to debate such issues, the Home Office, the Scottish Office and the Scottish Executive must think very seriously about the establishment of a concordat. If we do not, we shall play into the hands of the secessionists.

8.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): The Home Secretary was as slick and professional as always, but it occurred to me that he had taken some advice from the late Winston Churchill, who would write a marginal note when devising his speeches. I believe that one of Winston Churchill's notes was, "Weak argument: shout." The Home Secretary's presentation included a considerable amount of shouting and arm waving. We were presented with not so much an argument, but a sieve through which the words dropped.

This major Bill is complex and has been debated long. Many amendments to it were made in the other place. Today, we have the final, ultimate opportunity to consider the Bill, and the 367 amendments from the Government and the two from the combined might of the Opposition.

This is the fourth guillotine motion that we have debated in four days.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Two days.

Mr. Stunell: My hon. Friend reminds me that it is two days.

In yesterday's debate on the timetable motion, our attention was drawn to the Railways Act 1993 and other Bills to which many amendments have been tabled in the past. According to the figures given by Ministers yesterday, the ratio of the number of amendments coming back from the Lords to the number of clauses in this Bill is even more dramatic. Now our time is even more restricted.

I want to stay strictly in order while I draw the attention of the House to two or three specific issues that the guillotine will prevent from being discussed fully and properly. The first is Lords amendment No. 1, which introduces a new and different form of detention into United Kingdom law. A fundamentally new principle will be skated over in the debate that is to be crammed into our remaining time.

As the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) said, many of the amendments covered by the guillotine motion are about the difficulties created by the backlog of asylum seekers in this country, and they are much too low down the list to be discussed properly.

The serious new proposals that are coming to the House from the other place will therefore not be discussed. They will have an impact not only on asylum seekers, but on local authorities and communities, especially in the south-east, but elsewhere as well. They will not be afforded the proper attention that the House would pay them if it were doing its duty.

Over the past two years, the House collectively has made serious efforts to improve the way in which it deals with legislation. It is a great pity that this Government, at this stage, in this Session, is throwing away much of that

[Mr. Stunell]

progress by repeatedly moving guillotine motions. It is a great shame to see the benefits thrown away, and to realise what damage will be done and what potential faults and flaws will pass into law as a result of our failure to discuss the amendments properly.

The guillotine is unnecessary. We had days of slack business last week, including parliamentary days that ended early. We had a serious substantial debate, not on asylum or on new powers of detention but on—

Miss Widdecombe: Vellum.

Mr. Stunell: Yes, it was on whether we should write our Acts on vellum. If arranging for votes about vellum is the best that the Government business managers can do to get the business of the House in good order and to make good legislation, it is a sad commentary both on their performance and on that of the Government.

The Liberal Democrats will oppose the guillotine. We believe that the time left should be devoted to the serious issues that have emerged from the other place, so I hope that we can proceed quickly to a vote.

8.22 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The guillotine is a serious mistake. The nature and history of the Bill make it especially unsuitable to be subject to a guillotine in the routine way to which we seem to be becoming accustomed under the present Government.

I shall briefly dispose of the Home Secretary's argument about the Opposition's past conduct towards the Bill. I am rather curious about his attitude, because at the end of last month, when it was announced that record numbers of people were seeking asylum in this country, the right hon. Gentleman was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* as saying as saying that the figures showed the need for the Tories to stop opposing the Bill.

I was not aware that Tories had ever started opposing the Bill. The records will show that on both Second and Third Reading, this party did not oppose it. May I let the Home Secretary into a little secret? The Conservative party was about the only organisation that did not oppose the Bill. The Liberal Democrats opposed it—although they never seem to get the blame, perhaps because they pay the Home Secretary nice compliments on the Floor of the House before they vote against his Bill.

Almost every organisation that appeared before the Special Standing Committee criticised the Bill. Hardly any of them had a good word to say about it. Indeed, the procedure followed in the Special Standing Committee is another reason why the Bill should not be subject to a guillotine. The Government are in a curious position because, at first, they said that the Bill required great debate and careful consideration, and therefore needed a Special Standing Committee. I give them credit for doing so, although perhaps the Home Secretary was almost obliged to, because he had made the absence of a Special Standing Committee his principal ground for opposition to the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996.

I heard what the Home Secretary said about the virtues of Special Standing Committees, and I hope that there will be many more of them in future—but I am not holding my breath. After the Special Standing Committee finished its deliberations and the Bill came back to the Floor of the House, the Government applied a guillotine straight away, before there had been one word of debate on it, although the Bill was of great interest both inside and outside the House—not least on the Government Benches.

Then the Bill went to the House of Lords, and a huge mass of amendments, some on entirely new subjects, were made. Yet when the Bill comes back to the House of Commons, it is guillotined again. Some of the amendments require detailed debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) has already referred to one of them, which was introduced by the Bishop of Southwark. According to the Home Secretary, the bishop, along with all the Cross Benchers and all the other bishops, seems to have joined the forces of Conservatism.

That amendment requires extremely careful consideration, because the Government's case has always been that no one should be subject for long to the new system that they propose to set up. They have said that people cannot be expected to live under that system for long periods. The link has rightly been made by the amendment in lieu and the amendment, and we need time to debate the matter.

That is especially true because things have moved on since the Home Secretary gave evidence to the Special Standing Committee in March and told us, on the subject of waiting times, backlogs and decision times, that he was "on the case". What has happened since then? I am afraid that the backlog has got even bigger, having increased from 75,000 to 90,000. The number of decisions being taken is lagging hopelessly behind the number of applications from asylum seekers, so the whole system is in imminent danger of collapse.

Nobody takes the Government's contention about waiting times seriously, because the average waiting time for all applicants now, for the first time, exceeds four years. The Home Secretary tiptoed into the arguments about the nature of the system that he inherited. Indeed, if he could get back to the levels of decision making and clearance of the backlog that existed under the previous Government, that would be a wonderful achievement by the present Government's standards.

The Special Standing Committee received evidence from one organisation to the effect that when its representatives talked about the waiting times with officials, officials gave a nod and a wink and a knowing smile. Nobody, even in his own Department, takes the Home Secretary's contentions about backlogs and waiting times seriously.

The system is in danger of collapse and we need time to debate that. The Home Secretary is following the Government's course of routinely and arrogantly imposing a guillotine, but I have a sneaking suspicion at the back of my mind that that is partly because the system is in such an awful mess that the right hon. Gentleman simply does not want to debate it.

8.27 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): There are three reasons for opposing the guillotine, as I intend to. The first is the traditional reason advanced by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe)—who, unfortunately, has voted for

as many guillotines as I have voted against over the past 12 years. If she reflects on the number of guillotine motions tabled by the Conservative Government, she will realise that that rather undermines her case.

The second reason is one that was advanced by the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman)—many hon. Members have mispronounced his constituency tonight, and I am sure that if anybody else does so, it will turn the hon. Gentleman himself into a secessionist. The Scottish part of the legislation will not be debated if the guillotine is carried and applied. That causes serious concern, although perhaps that is not reflected by the number of Scottish Members of Parliament here for the debate. None the less, there are serious concerns held in Scotland, which are worthy of debate. I can think of many times in the past 20 years or so when key aspects of Scottish legislation have not been debated here because of the impact of guillotines.

The third reason why this Bill should not be subject to a guillotine is by far the most important. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde was right to say that it contains provisions that directly impinge on the powers of the Scottish Parliament—on mental health, social work, housing and the rent Acts. Those are subjects that this House decided to devolve to the Scottish Parliament. Far from imposing a guillotine to prevent debate here on those vital matters, the Home Secretary—if he had any humility or any respect for the democratic process in Scotland—would send the issues to the Scots Parliament and allow time for them to be properly and effectively considered there.

When the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde raised that point with the Home Secretary, he airily brushed it aside.

Mr. Straw *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Salmond: Yes, the right hon. Gentleman did. He said that immigration and asylum are issues for this House, but that is not the point that the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde was making. He was pointing out that legislation directly within the powers of the Scottish Parliament will be substantially amended by the Bill. It is not a question of the policy of the Westminster Government, because that legislation is under the power of the Scottish Parliament and should be debated in adequate time there.

The Home Secretary has said that he wishes for good relationships between the Scottish Parliament and this place. One way to cause the breakdown of such a relationship is to act in the arrogant and high-handed manner that he has adopted over this Bill. He should send it for due consideration to the Scots Parliament, and if that means delaying the legislation and allowing more time for thought and debate, so be it. What is the point of this House devolving power over key pieces of legislation, but retaining the ability to amend them—and doing so without adequate debate even among hon. Members here? It is high-handed, arrogant and the very opposite of the process of devolution that this Administration were pledged to support. I hope that the Home Secretary will reflect on that and on the reasons why many right hon. and hon. Members will oppose the guillotine for consistent reasons.

8.31 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I hoped that even at this eleventh hour the Home Secretary would accept that the guillotine is excessive and that he should grant more time for this debate. Some of us have sat through at least two debates on the Bill but have not had the opportunity to contribute.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) for the courageous way in which he has stood up to much abuse on this issue and I hope that many of us faced with the same issue would have had the same courage. The issue does not affect only London and the south-east. I represent an area that has an ongoing problem with illegal immigrants, and with carriers who bring people into the country. The word bogus would be appropriately used for those people who advise many asylum seekers. I am sickened by the amounts of money that some people make out of innocent people who are merely trying to get their lives back together. They have come to this country to make a better life for themselves and often, more importantly, to take their families and themselves out of danger.

I am disappointed that the Home Secretary is not confident enough to give the House the opportunity to consider carefully amendments that are coming before us for the first time today, at what is the eleventh hour for the Bill. He makes the good point that Bills have to be amended, and nobody can deny that. The 300 amendments are not excessive—last night we tried to debate 800. He has a long way to go by those standards.

This House deserves the courtesy of being able to discuss in depth such far-reaching legislation that reflects the way in which this country treats its own and people who come here seeking a safe haven. Our reputation is at stake on the type of legislation that we are prepared to put into action, and if we are not prepared to allow sufficient time to ensure the scrutiny that the Bill deserves, we are selling the reputation of this country—not to mention this House—short. I implore the Home Secretary to allow those of us who have not had a chance to speak on the Bill to discuss the issues affecting our own areas, and—more importantly—the whole House to discuss in detail the amendments before us.

8.34 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on her magnificent speech. My only criticism is that I found her language too moderate. This is a rotten Government. They are the most anti-democratic Government of my lifetime. We all knew that the Home Secretary would say that the Conservatives used guillotines on Bills, but I advise him to re-read his election manifesto in which—sickeningly—he claimed that we would enter a new era with a new type of Government. Of course, what do we find? So far, we have had 11 Bills guillotined this Session, and four of them have been guillotined twice. I do not know how the Home Secretary can have the nerve to say that in five hours we can analyse 367 amendments seriously. Some Conservative Members may believe that they have been sent to the House to scrutinise the Executive. Good grief: do they not realise that the Government find it offensive for anyone to scrutinise any issue?

I understand that early-day motion 986 will be debated in tonight's Adjournment debate. I hope that the Home Secretary will wait to hear that debate, in which a former

[Mr. David Amess]

Labour Minister, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), will tell the House exactly what he feels about this rotten Government.

I am very angry about the Government's cavalier attitude, as I wanted to spend some time sharing thoughts with the Home Secretary about the impact of his appalling measures on my poor constituents in Southend. The shambles that is this Bill will have a very adverse effect on genuine asylum seekers there, and on local residents.

The Government are a disgrace and the Bill is a shambles. I hope very much that those Labour Members who are not sycophantically waiting for preferment from this rotten Government will have the courage to join us in the Lobby to vote against this wicked guillotine motion.

Mr. Straw: The House will excuse me if I do not follow the lead of the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), except to say that I suggest that he should not start exchanging statistics about numbers of guillotine motions. He was a Member of Parliament in 1988–89, a Session in which 11 Bills, rather than nine, were guillotined.

I shall deal with two points that were raised. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) said that there ought to be more time in which to debate the Bill. I understand the concern expressed by hon. Members of all parties about the large number of Government amendments that have been tabled towards the end of proceedings on the Bill. That sometimes happens, under all Governments and on all sorts of Bills. However, if the hon. Gentleman looks at the total range of consultation that has been held on this Bill and the White Paper that preceded it, he will accept that it has been very extensive.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) raised the question of the relationship between this Bill and the clear duties and rights of the Scottish Parliament. I think that all parties accept that the matter at the heart of the Bill is reserved, but from 1 April 2000, the support of asylum seekers—in Scotland, as well as in the rest of the United Kingdom—will rest with the Secretary of State and not individual local authorities.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 339, Noes 175.

Division No. 315] **[8.38 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*

Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. David Clelland.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Cynog
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*

Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Jacqui Lait and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Order of the House [15th June] be supplemented as follows:

Lords Amendments

1.—(1) Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion five hours after the commencement of proceedings on this Order.

(2) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order: No. 135, Nos. 1 to 134 and Nos. 136 to 369.

(3) Proceedings on Lords Amendment No. 135 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill.

2.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing the proceedings on Amendment No. 135 to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1(3).

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(3) If that Question is for the amendment of the Lords Amendment, the Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on the Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

3.—(1) This paragraph applies for the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1(1).

(2) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(3) If that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, the Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any further Amendment of the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in the Amendment as amended.

(4) The Speaker shall then put forthwith—

(a) the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment, and

(b) the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House agrees or disagrees with the Lords in the Amendment or (as the case may be) in their Amendment as amended.

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House disagrees with the Lords in a Lords Amendment.

(6) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments.

(7) As soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments, or disposed of an Amendment relevant to a Lords Amendment which has been disagreed to, the Speaker shall put forthwith a single Question on any Amendments moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to the Lords Amendment.

Subsequent stages

4.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(3) Sub-paragraphs (4) to (7) apply for the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion.

(4) The Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided.

(5) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair.

(6) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on any item.

(7) The Speaker shall then put forthwith the Question, That this House agrees with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Reasons Committee

5. The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

6.—(1) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

(2) Proceedings in the Committee shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion 30 minutes after their commencement.

(3) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with sub-paragraph (2) the Chairman shall—

(a) first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and has not yet been decided; and

(b) then put forthwith successively Questions on motions which may be made by a Minister of the Crown for assigning a Reason for disagreeing with the Lords in any of their Amendments.

(4) The proceedings of the Committee shall be reported without any further Question being put.

Miscellaneous

7. If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the expiry of the period at the end of which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

8.—(1) In this paragraph "the proceedings" means proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments, on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill, on the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the Report of such a Committee.

(2) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(3) The proceedings shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(4) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, the proceedings shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

9. If proceedings on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House would, by virtue of Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration), commence at a time when proceedings to which paragraph 8 applies are in progress, proceedings on the Motion shall be postponed to the conclusion of those proceedings.

Immigration and Asylum Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I must draw it to the attention of the House that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 1, 14, 135, 152, 164, 167, 174, 180, 183, 184, 189, 191, 193, 194, 250, 275, 279 and 287. If the House agrees to any of those Lords amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the *Journal*.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 135, after clause 84, to insert the following new clause—*Eligibility for social security benefits*—

(". An asylum-seeker, and his dependants (if any), shall be eligible for any social security benefits to which they would have been entitled if neither Part VI of this Act or Schedule 1 to the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 had been in force, until such time as the Secretary of State has placed a report in the Library of the House of Commons giving details of the average process times in the determination of—

(a) initial asylum decisions; and

(b) appeals to adjudicators against initial asylum decisions,

and certifying that the average time from the lodging of the application for asylum to the determination of an adjudicator of the appeal against the initial asylum decisions is less than six months.")

8.53 pm

Mr. Straw: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment (a) in lieu of the Lords amendment.

Mr. Straw: It may be helpful if I first explain the effect that amendment No. 135 would have if it were left in the Bill. It would restore social security benefits to all asylum seekers until such time as the average two and four-month targets for asylum cases had been met. Social security benefits would be available not only to those who now receive them as port applicants, but to those who are not at present entitled to them following an initial decision or who have claimed in-country. In that critical respect, the amendment, which Conservative Members in the other place supported with the full backing of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), would overturn a key decision in the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 to remove the right to social security and any other benefits from those who claimed in-country.

We estimate—those estimates have been made available and have not been challenged—that the amendment could result in about 40,000 additional asylum applications in a full year. The costs of supporting that number of cases would be about £500 million. It would be a complete reversal of the legislation which the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald, among others, helped to guide through Parliament.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): The Home Secretary said that the figures had not been challenged. I would like to challenge them and many of the interested groups and experts who gave evidence to the Special Standing Committee also challenged them. The figures

[Mr. Richard Allan]

that the right hon. Gentleman has cited are an estimate drawn up by himself with no credible supporting evidence. It is purely finger-in-the-air stuff from the Home Office to get at the Conservative party for supporting the amendment in the House of Lords.

Mr. Straw: First, the figures were not drawn up by me—although I do take an interest in statistics, as is famously known—but by officials. Secondly, although I understand that, on the whole, the Liberals are not in the least bothered about the cost of their promises, because they will never be in government, the Conservatives—at least in the past—were concerned about costs. One of the main reasons that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) argued for the removal of the entitlement to cash benefits for half of asylum seekers is the simple and straightforward fact that, if cash benefits are available to asylum seekers, they act as a pull factor and an encouragement to those asylum seekers who want to abuse the system. There is a significantly higher rate of take-up of cash benefits—including by many people who make fraudulent claims—than there is of benefits provided in kind.

I point out to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) and to Conservative Members—whose spokesperson, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald, actively supported the Lords amendment, as she made clear to the House on 26 October—that a consequence of a measure to restore cash benefits to in-country applicants could be to provide an inducement not just for many fraudulent asylum seekers to come to this country, but for some people already in this country, who hold British passports or rights of residence, to invent new identities in order to claim social security benefits. The amendment drives a coach and horses through the arrangements that we are establishing; it is an open encouragement to fraud, and there is no question that the costs would run to £400 million or £500 million. However, we shall not find out for certain whether that will be so, because we invite the House to reject the amendment.

Amendment No. 135 would overturn all the arrangements that we are setting up in the Bill, including one of the key arrangements made by the previous Administration—to remove cash benefits. When the Conservative Government proposed changes to the previous system of support, they did only half a job. They decided to continue cash benefits for those who applied at port; they took away the right to receive cash benefits for those who applied in-country, but they failed to provide any alternative safety net. That was a profound defect in the legislation. Instead of making alternative arrangements, the Conservative Government appeared to believe that in-country applicants would be able to rely on friends and their own community for support. Only a later decision of the courts—to the effect that asylum seekers should not be left wholly destitute while they were pursuing a legitimate claim for asylum—resulted in asylum seekers gaining access to assistance from local authorities under social services legislation. That legislation was never intended for such purposes, and reliance on it has led to huge problems for the local authorities concerned, especially those in inner-London boroughs, and several in Kent—including those in Dover, Folkestone and throughout the southern part of Kent.

The pressure on housing and other social services both from asylum seekers and those housed by local authorities in those areas is intense and unsustainable. It results in problems for London local authorities, and indeed for Kent local authorities, in discharging their duties towards local homeless households under homelessness legislation. Asylum seekers themselves often end up in extremely poor conditions. No one—including some of those who oppose other aspects of the Bill—believes that such concentration of asylum seekers in one part of the country is sensible or defensible.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary will know well that a borough such as mine is confronted daily—as are those represented by inner-London colleagues—by the pressures that he describes. One way of dealing with those matters, to take the pressure off local government, would be for the Government to take the view that, until a decision has been taken on those asylum seekers who want to stay here, responsibility for them could, and should, be taken by the Government. The Government could fund the asylum seekers and ensure the repayment to local authorities of any funding that they have to disburse in advance, while the decisions are made. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that?

9 pm

Mr. Straw: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's proposition, and that is exactly what the Bill would achieve. I hope that he will perform the same U-turn as the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald, appreciate the error of his ways and of the course adopted by his noble Friends in another place and support our motion to reject Lords amendment No. 135. Our measures are designed to remove responsibility from local authorities, relieve pressure on the hon. Gentleman's borough and many others, and establish a national system of dispersal in which the Government take responsibility.

Implicit in amendment No. 135 is an assumption that the new support arrangements will be in some way inferior to the current arrangements; I do not accept that. Under the new arrangements, asylum seekers who are destitute will receive good-quality accommodation appropriate to their needs. That may take the form of full board and lodging, or self-contained and self-catering accommodation suitable for families and others who are able to look after themselves. In the latter case, the support will include vouchers, in addition to a cash allowance of £10 per person per week, to meet the asylum seeker's and his dependants' living needs. Asylum seekers will have access to a wide range of outlets throughout the country in which to redeem the vouchers.

Dr. Godman: My question about vouchers is prompted by a letter I received from Dr. Alison Elliot, who is the convener of the Committee on Church and Nation of the Church of Scotland. She argues that such a system will be

"costly and cumbersome, and . . . demeaning."

There is speculation in Scotland that the voucher system will not be implemented north of the border. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, or is that speculation without foundation?

Mr. Straw: I was going to deal later with one matter of speculation about the voucher system: the interim

arrangements that will apply from December to 1 April, when the new full arrangements are due to come into force. However, for the convenience of the House, I shall deal with that now.

In a consultation paper issued in August, the Government proposed that the amount of cash support that local authorities are able to pay under existing arrangements for in-country applicants be limited to £10 per person per week in all cases. Many of the responses to the consultation paper objected to changing the arrangements currently applied by local authorities for a period of only four or five months. Those responses included representations from the Child Poverty Action Group and many other bodies.

After heeding the consultation, the Government concluded that, during the interim period before the new national system comes into force on 1 April, local authorities should be able to continue to give all support to families in cash for their living needs, as they choose. Some local authorities operate in that way under the current arrangements, whereas others do not. The £10 cash limit would continue to apply in the case of the single asylum seeker. I should make it clear that, under the arrangements established by the National Assistance Act 1948, local authorities are not allowed to provide any cash at all; therefore, our proposals for the interim period provide additional flexibility.

As for the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) about whether the new full arrangements to be rolled out from 1 April would apply to the whole of the United Kingdom, or whether the use of vouchers would be abandoned in Scotland, the answer is that they will apply to the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Allan: The Home Secretary mentions families held under the current arrangements until April 2000. Does he mean until a fixed date of April 2000, or until the point at which the time limit is down to six months, which is what we previously understood would be the time that families would come under the new system?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I shall answer that point in a minute.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I am puzzled by the news my right hon. Friend has just imparted, because local government is one of the responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament and separate arrangements have always been made for Scotland. If the legislation is to apply UK-wide, it should have been discussed in the Scottish Parliament and there should have been discussions between UK Ministers and Scottish Ministers; yet, as far as I am aware, no such discussions have taken place.

Mr. Straw: With great respect to my hon. Friend, she and my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde dealt with this matter at some length in interventions in the debate on the timetable motion. I believe that no one—not even the Scottish National party—could argue with the fact that if we have a Union, questions of immigration and asylum must be a reserved matter, not a devolved matter. However, the issue does have an impact on local authorities, so we have held detailed discussions with the Scottish Executive.

In response to a point raised earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde, we propose that there should be a concordat to inform and govern the relations between ourselves, the Scottish Executive and Scottish local authorities. We recognise the local sensitivities. We are grateful for the co-operation that we have received from those bodies as well as from the relevant bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In setting up the new support arrangements, we are providing a level of support that is broadly equivalent to that which asylum seekers could expect to get, were social security benefits still available to them. Under those plans, support for children will be equivalent to 100 per cent. of child benefit levels.

We have amended the Bill to place a Secretary of State under a duty to meet the accommodation and essential living needs of families with children under the age of 18. Members on both sides of the House will recall that that was a matter of concern; we have ensured that we have met it. The assistance that families receive will be comparable to that provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. All the other safeguards for children contained in that Act will continue to apply. New arrangements will ensure 24-hour cover so that families always have somewhere to turn in an emergency.

The House knows that we propose to disperse most asylum seekers away from London and the south-east, to relieve the pressure on those areas. In doing so, our aim is to make better use of spare and underused housing in less pressured parts of the country. I believe that that is sensible, and I do not believe that the genuine asylum seeker who is fleeing persecution will mind where in the country he is properly accommodated for the period while his claim is processed.

We shall neither disperse asylum seekers at random nor leave them in isolation. Rather, we shall seek to house people from similar backgrounds in the same general locality, wherever possible, in sufficient numbers for them to rely on a degree of mutual support and help. We shall also form partnerships with the voluntary sector to establish one-stop shops that will assist asylum seekers in navigating their way around their new surroundings and accessing local health and welfare facilities as necessary. We are providing funding for those centres.

As we said in the White Paper, we are determined to achieve faster processing targets for asylum applications. As is plain from the text of the White Paper that I published in July 1998, we never said that the new support arrangements would be introduced only when the two and four-month targets had been achieved. New support arrangements have always been due to come into force in April 2000. We said that we would aim to beat the two and four-month targets for most—but not all—applicants by April 2001. Early introduction of the new support arrangements is a key part of the wider strategy for reforming the system, achieving the targets, and bearing down on the so-called pull factors in the present system which, unquestionably, have attracted many asylum seekers with unfounded claims to this country, as they have to many other European countries.

We recognise that, especially in the early stages, there may be cases in which support under the new system lasts longer than six-months. Similarly, for in-country applicants, support through local authority vouchers may last longer than six months. For families, support through

[Mr. Straw]

vouchers is the arrangement provided by many, but not all, local authorities, whereas for single asylum seekers it is the universal system of support provided by local authorities.

For that reason I agreed, earlier in the summer, following representations from colleagues, that families with children would not be brought into the new support system until the process targets for those cases could be achieved. We aim to achieve those by April 2000.

It may reassure my hon. Friends to know that since 1 October, all new applications from families with children have been identified for rapid processing. About 600 such applications were made in October, and most applicants have been given 14 days to prepare their case and return for interview. Of 78 families making personal applications in Croydon, decisions have been made in 50 cases, including two grants of refugee status and one of exceptional leave to remain. At the end of September, the average time for dealing with an asylum appeal to an adjudicator was 13 weeks, which is one month inside the four month target.

Concerns were raised in the other place by the Bishop of Southwark and others who supported amendment No. 135. Those concerns have been raised in turn with me by my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Mr. Casale), who passed on representations from the Council of Christians and Jews. I hope that what I have said about the interim arrangements and the bringing into force of new support arrangements for families will help to reassure my hon. Friend and those on whose behalf he made his points.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): If the faster turnaround time for families with children is maintained, does the Home Secretary intend from 1 April next year to transfer families with children who are currently in the backlog of cases ahead of other applicants away from local authority support or social security benefits towards the new arrangements?

Mr. Straw: The most practical way to proceed is that people whose cases exist before 1 April next year should remain the responsibility of the relevant local authority. That may not last forever, but from our negotiations with local authorities it seems to be the least disruptive arrangement. We may proceed differently in due course, but if someone has waited a year or two years in a particular area, it would be unacceptable to require that person to move in order to meet a national dispersal policy. Typically, such people will have made arrangements for schooling, health care and so on. Financial responsibility will move to the Home Office, but we will not move people who are settled, for the time being, and whose cases have frankly taken too long to be dealt with. I hope that that policy is acceptable across the House.

In discussing our targets for families and others, I am talking about meeting targets for most cases, not all. Some families will inevitably stay longer in the system. In relation to other cases, we have announced that we will make discretionary payments to asylum seekers—families or single people—who stay in the support system through no fault of their own for more than six months, another point on which concern was raised earlier in the year. There will be a single payment of £50 per person for an asylum seeker and his or her dependants. That would be additional to the normal support, and paid in the form of a cashable voucher. A further payment will be made in cases, hopefully small in number, where a person remains in the support system for more than 12 months.

The arrangements to be established under part VI of the Bill will be fairer than the present system. They will be better than they are for some asylum seekers at the moment, and in all cases, they will certainly be no worse. They make more effective use of available resources, and they will be a disincentive to those who seek to exploit the asylum system for their own ends.

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): Would my right hon. Friend tell me how confident he feels of his ability to meet the targets for single claimants by April 2001? In the Select Committee on Home Affairs, I asked the Lord Chancellor a similar question about the target for appointing adjudicators to enable the targets to be met, and he said that he would be a very brave man if he answered that.

Mr. Straw: I am a brave man, so I shall answer the question. We aim to meet the target. The target for appeal cases has already been met, although we cannot guarantee that it will continue to be met as the number of asylum claimants increases.

It is well known—indeed, it has been a matter of considerable debate in the House—that the number of asylum seekers in this country has increased greatly in recent months and has created a huge burden, not least for local authorities in Kent. The number has not risen because we are a soft touch, as the Opposition claim—I reject that suggestion. The largest increase is in asylum seekers from countries in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, which has been subject to great violence and political disruption. Many of those people are genuine asylum seekers, others are chancers who masquerade as genuine asylum seekers. The second largest increase is in asylum seekers from Somalia, where there is no effective Government and great political violence. Although we also receive applications from countries where the risk of persecution is non-existent or tiny, the pressure on all European countries is related to the extent of political violence in other individual countries.

9.15 pm

To put the matter in perspective, Ireland, which previously received no asylum claims, has received 1,000 applications in one month. Given the size of the Republic of Ireland, the proportion of claims is significantly higher per head of population there than in the United Kingdom.

The severe pressure on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate has increased. We are working hard to solve the problems that were caused earlier in the year by a combination of the computer system and a change of accommodation. I am happy to debate the terms for the computer system that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald signed in 1996. She almost signed blind a contract that contained no contingency arrangements. I shall debate the matter with her or her deputy at any time. I shall make the contract available to

her so that she understands what she signed and why the combination of the contract and having to move to different accommodation created severe difficulties.

We have reversed the cuts in staff that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald planned. We have employed hundreds of new staff; hundreds more are being recruited. I hope that we shall meet the two month plus four month target for new applicants by April 2001, but I cannot guarantee that.

As I have already made clear, if asylum applicants remain in the system for more than six months through no fault of their own, we shall pay them periodic single payments of £50 a head every six months.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow) *rose—*

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I gave way earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), but I shall do so again.

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way so gracefully. I am genuinely anxious to clarify the position of those whose cases form part of the black backlog. There are thousands of them in east London and other inner-city areas. My right hon. Friend said that such people would not be subject to dispersal. However, he also seemed to claim that the new support arrangements would apply to them—and they would thus lose their entitlement to benefits. Will my right hon. Friend clarify that point?

Mr. Straw: On a phased basis, we intend to transfer formal responsibility for those people from local authorities. In many cases, we shall use the same local authorities as agents on behalf of the asylum support system. There is no argument between my hon. Friend and me. If people have waited for some time for the processing of a claim—whether it is genuine or unfounded; the circumstances of the transfer from their country are often traumatic—and have settled in an area, I, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and the officials in the Department have no interest in gratuitously disrupting reasonably settled lives. We shall transfer the responsibility for making payments to them, but that responsibility is essentially administrative. In almost every case, the asylum seeker will not notice the change.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I would like clarification on the issue of periodic payments. Will my right hon. Friend advise the House how periodic the payments will be? When will they be reviewed?

Mr. Straw: They will be paid every six months.

As this is a short debate, I should like to bring my remarks to a close. I shall do that by seeking to draw out from the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), who is deputising for the shadow Home Secretary, exactly what has happened inside the Conservative party since Conservative peers supported amendment No. 135 in another place just three weeks ago.

In the debate on the timetable motion, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald sought to suggest that her noble Friend Lord Cope of Berkeley had given only qualified support to amendment No. 135 when it was debated in the other place as amendment No. 118. However, I have Lord Cope's speech before me and he gave unqualified support to the amendment, which would cost £500 million and would restore cash benefits to those from whom they were taken away as a result of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. Lord Cope said:

"Therefore I support amendment No. 118."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 October 1999; Vol. 605, c. 1147.]

I wrote to the right hon. Lady, expressing some surprise that she was going to continue to ask for arrangements that she had withdrawn from asylum seekers in 1996 and, more importantly, that she was going to continue to impose a severe burden on her constituents, on those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) and on those of every Member representing a constituency in Kent or in London. She replied and said that amendment No. 135 was sensible and common sense. I put that point to her in the House and asked her to understand what she had done, but she brushed aside my suggestion that the amendment would—as it is bound to—continue the existing burden on Kent and London local authorities. She said:

"Amendment No. 118"—

as it then was—

"was moved by the Bishop of Southwark . . . and was supported by us".—[*Official Report*, 26 October 1999; Vol. 336, c. 818.]

She said that without qualification. That was the right hon. Lady's view just two weeks ago, but we are now told that she has changed her mind. Instead, she has tabled an amendment that is, frankly, almost meaningless.

I understand the truth, and I think that everyone else does. As I warned the right hon. Lady in the debate on 26 October, one of the dangers of the kind of instantaneous opposition that she practises and her willingness to answer every telephone call from a journalist and then to give an instantaneous quotation, is that one ends up speaking before one thinks. That, of course, is exactly what she has done. There was a suggestion that I should not offer that warning to the right hon. Lady, in case she learned the error of her ways. However, she is so incorrigible that there is no danger of that.

The right hon. Lady thought that the amendment was a good ruse, so she got Lord Cope of Berkeley not just to support it sotto voce, but to add his name to it and to whip into the Lobby every Conservative peer, including hereditary peers, who could be found. However, she had not worked out for a second what the amendment would cost, but when I put the cost to her, as I did in a letter that I wrote to her and again on the Floor of the House, she thought that she could brazen it out. What she did not see in the debate on 26 October was the faces of the Conservative Members sitting behind her. Their faces were filled with horror at what she had let them in for—and she has let them in for something.

The amendment, which the Opposition are trying to move in lieu, is of no consequence. It is meaningless, but I shall not detain the House on why it is. It seeks to have some information put before the House, but after the relevant part of the Bill has come into force rather than before. We want the hon. Member for Aylesbury, who will speak on the right hon. Lady's behalf, to tell us why the Conservative Members supported that £500 million amendment and why they were ready to continue the

[Mr. Straw]

burden on the people of Kent and of London, a burden which they placed on them in the first place and which the Bill and my motion seek to relieve.

Mr. Lidington: I would have had rather more regard for the Home Secretary's final tirade had he not been the then Opposition spokesman who fought tooth and nail against the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and every measure taken by Conservative Governments to enforce stricter laws against illegal immigration and the abuse of the asylum system.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) explained fully during her remarks on the timetable motion that Conservative peers joined Cross Benchers, Labour peers and Liberal Democrat peers to support the Bishop of Southwark's amendment as the best vehicle for getting a further debate in this House about the way in which the Government's voucher scheme, which we have said repeatedly that we support, risks being destabilised by inadequate preparation and forethought on the part of Home Office Ministers.

The reason for the Home Secretary's patent embarrassment tonight has been the faces and expressions of his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Benches behind him. The last thing that he wanted, particularly this evening after proceedings on a different Bill, was a debate on an issue that arouses disquiet not just among members of opposition parties, but among many long-standing and loyal members of his own party.

We are entitled to be sceptical about the Government's reassurances, not simply because of their record in opposing Conservative measures to restrict the abuse of asylum, but because of their record during their two and a half years in office. There have been record queues, record asylum applications and record backlogs building up at the Croydon headquarters of the immigration and nationality directorate.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is surely not leaving the Opposition's support for amendment No. 135 there. Is that all that he intends to say about it?

What the hon. Gentleman claims about the position taken in the other place is simply untrue. Lord Cope said none of the things that the hon. Gentleman suggests he said. He said nothing about the amendment being a vehicle for debate. There are many other vehicles for debate. He said that he supported it. That is what the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald said. When she wrote back to me, she was trying to justify the content of amendment No. 135. Why has the hon. Gentleman changed his tune and backed off?

Mr. Lidington: The Home Secretary fails to point out that when my right hon. Friend wrote to him, she made it clear that she was not prepared to take any lessons on the issue of asylum seekers from a Government who had presided over record numbers of applications, the vast majority of them bogus, and who had presided over the grinding to a halt of the processing system because of the mismanagement within the Home Office, presided over by Ministers.

It is no good the Home Secretary seeking to attribute all blame for delay and difficulties in administration on the situation that he inherited. His Department's annual report a year ago, which I assume he read before putting his name to it, stated with regard to the immigration and nationality directorate:

"The situation has now settled, and the majority of problems have been resolved."

However, if we examine the check list of the targets that the Government set for themselves in the White Paper on asylum and immigration published in July 1998, we find that they are failing dismally to achieve the objectives that they had set, taking into account the situation that existed.

The target for asylum decisions during the financial year 1999-2000 was 59,000. In the first half of that financial year, the total number of decisions taken was 20,605. It was running at a rate about one third below the Government's professed target. The same applies to appeals disposals. The target was 46,000, but the actual number of appeals processed was 15,000 for the half year—again, roughly one third down on the target that Ministers had set for themselves.

9.30 pm

The impact of that is seen in the additional expenditure that the Government have to find. According to a recent written answer from the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), the budget for asylum seekers support, for which they had set a target of £350 million for the current financial year, will be between £450 million and £490 million,

Not only the Opposition but the Government themselves have linked delays and backlogs to the effectiveness of the new support arrangements which they plan to introduce under part VI. On page 40 of the White Paper, the Government said that they could not establish the new, faster asylum process, to which they were committed, without first tackling the backlogs. They also said, on page 36, that delays send a clear message to abusive applicants that the system cannot cope and is ripe for exploitation.

Earlier this year during proceedings on the Bill, the Government repeatedly made a virtue of their intention that the new system of support should be short term. In the asylum support information document published by the Government in March 1999, the arrangements embodied in part VI are described as:

"a short-term, basic safety-net arrangement".

The then Minister with responsibility for immigration told the Special Standing Committee on 4 May that, in considering the accommodation needs of asylum seekers, it must be remembered that they are likely to be here for only a short time.

Some Liberal Democrats may have strong objections in principle to the voucher scheme, while other Conservative Members support the measure in principle but are gravely worried about the difficulties that the Government face in implementing the scheme. However, there are real concerns about the gap that is opening up between the Government's stated objectives and the practical challenge that the Government face in implementing these complex new arrangements in the short time scale that Ministers have set themselves.

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): In 1996, the Conservative Government's removal of cash benefits

from asylum seekers was a disgraceful and inhuman act. In seeking to restore those benefits, they now accept that and that they were totally wrong.

Mr. Lidington: I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making, but what I find extraordinary, and what I suspect he finds somewhat embarrassing, is the way in which Ministers, having denounced the measures introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), now seem to be inching towards something which they believe follows in his footsteps even if they do not wish to alert their own Back Benchers to that fact.

The Government have set themselves a tight timetable for introducing the part VI measures. The voucher administration contract is due to be let at the end of this year. That contract will presumably have to arrange for the printing and distribution of the vouchers, for retailers to accept them and for a proper audit system to avoid fraud. All those systems must be put in place within three months flat.

The contract for the supply of Home Office-funded accommodation faces an even tighter time scale. That is intended to be awarded at the end of January 2000, leaving just 44 working days between the award of the contract and the new system coming into operation.

The sort of problems that the Government may face can be seen from their recent statements on the asylum seekers support agency. As recently as June, Ministers predicted that they would need between 100 and 200 additional staff to ensure that that agency operated efficiently; but less than five months later, the figure has risen to 512. That is between two and a half and five times the Government's original estimate of the number of staff that would be needed.

We have heard a lot from Ministers about the importance of the interim measures. There is broad agreement across the House that they are necessary to alleviate the burden on local authorities as quickly as possible but we are still waiting for the details, and we read in the newspapers of protests by local authorities about underfunding from the Home Office under the current arrangements and under the proposed arrangements in the Bill. The failure to clear the backlogs means that the Government will have to operate a multi-tier system of support from April 2000. There will be no simple transfer from the arrangements they inherited to a brand new, sparkling, hunky-dory system of asylum seeker support.

I understood the Home Secretary to say that somebody who had claimed at a port before April 2000 would continue to receive social security benefits after 1 April 2000 until either there had been an adverse decision on the case and the applicant was awaiting appeal or until some unspecified future date at which an unspecified transfer arrangement would come into force to take that asylum seeker on to the new part VI arrangements.

Similarly, somebody who had made a claim in-country before the end of March 2000 or was appealing after an adverse decision would remain on local authority support—or at least that level of support—until he, too, could be transferred at some unknown date and by some unknown arrangement to the new part VI arrangements. New asylum applicants would go on to the new arrangements from day one except for families with children, who, as the Home Secretary has said, would be treated in a different way. It seems that, after 1 April next year, the Government will be trying to run in parallel at least four different arrangements for asylum seeker support. Inevitably, that will breed a certain measure of complexity and it poses a real challenge for the practical operation of the scheme. The Government are at serious risk of underestimating how difficult that challenge may prove.

If I want to be partisan in the debate, I might say that the Child Support Agency is etched on the memory of many Members on both sides of the House. *[Interruption.]* Before Ministers become too excited—

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): They all supported it.

Mr. Lidington: Before Ministers become too excited, they should remember, as my hon. Friend points out, that they voted for the establishment of the CSA. They should also remember their experience this summer with the issue of passports and the payment of retirement pensions to newly retired people at the turn of this year, when many of them had to wait many weeks to receive the pension to which they were entitled because of a breakdown at the Benefits Agency.

Presumably, the new system under part VI of the Bill will involve the Home Office—or its contractors or agents—providing accommodation, furniture, bed linen, laundry facilities, washing and cooking facilities, crockery, cutlery, access to legal advice—

Mr. Allan: Changing light bulbs.

Mr. Lidington: Changing light bulbs, as the hon. Gentleman says. Some medical checks and medical cover will also be provided, and the Home Secretary knows that the British Medical Association is concerned about that. All that provision will have to be set up at breakneck speed and must be operational by 1 April next year. Disquiet is being expressed not only by politicians, but by local authorities—even those that want the new system to be put in place as quickly as possible—and the Immigration Advisory Service and organisations such as the Refugee Council. If the Home Office does not reflect carefully and devote continued concentration to the practical implementation of its scheme, there is a real danger that it will end up with a botched job. That will not be in the interests of the genuine asylum seeker or of fairness in this country.

It is in the Government's interests, and those of the asylum seekers on whose behalf they claim to be acting, for them to make sure that they put in place the practical arrangements for which the Opposition have been calling and report to the House of Commons regularly on what they have managed to achieve, rather than leave it to leaks and rumours in the media to provide Members of Parliament with information about their constituents. I hope that, even now, the Government will accept the amendment that the Opposition have urged on them. It would help them to ensure that the practical implementation of their scheme benefits the people of this country.

Mr. Gerrard: I shall try to be brief because I know that other hon. Members want to take part in this debate.

[Mr. Gerrard]

I do not want to spend very long on the Tory amendment because all we have heard from the Tory party in this debate has been utter hypocrisy. Not a single word has shown any real concern for asylum seekers and what happens to them. It is obvious that the one purpose of the amendment, which does not even try to get at the figures that matter, such as those on what is happening to families or individuals on the support scheme and how long they stay on it, is to amass ammunition for a knockabout argument with the Government over a couple of months. The amendment has nothing to do with the genuine interests of asylum seekers.

Everyone who is concerned with asylum and immigration wants a system that works, and works efficiently. I believe—I think that most people do—that the best deterrent to fraudulent claims is a system that makes quick decisions and enforces them. Creating such a system is the most important thing that we could do to sort out the problems.

The amendment is about more than decision making. It goes to the heart of the Bill's provisions on the support system; it refers to cash support. I want to put it on record again that I still believe that a cash support system is far superior to one that is based on vouchers. I shall not rehearse all the arguments about vouchers; suffice it to say that a cash support system is better, cheaper per capita and far easier to administer.

I have yet to see any convincing proof of the simplistic argument that cash benefits are a pull, although it is stated as an assertion, almost as if it were simply a matter of fact or common sense, and inevitable. The only statistics that I have ever heard quoted to support such an argument are on the shift in the balance of applications, as more people began to apply at port after cash benefits were withdrawn from in-country applicants. In fact, applications at port went from one third of the total pre-1996 to about 40 per cent. during 1996, up to 51 per cent. in 1997, and back down to 41 per cent. in 1999. Therefore, the balance has not shifted significantly.

Let us consider the detailed analysis of what has happened. In 1998—these are recent applications—nearly 40 per cent. of grants of asylum and 64 per cent. of grants of exceptional leave were made to port applicants. If it were true that fraudulent applicants were attracted by cash benefits, one would have expected the proportion of people being granted asylum and exceptional leave at port to have fallen. It did not.

Let us consider countries such as Yugoslavia, Somalia and Afghanistan from which no one disputes that many genuine applicants come. There are widely different patterns in the proportions of people who apply at port and in-country; the argument is not simplistic. There are obviously all sorts of factors at work concerning where people choose to apply. The question is not just simply of the pull of benefits. If there were such a pull, why are there so few asylum seekers in Scotland, where they still receive the full rate of income support, whoever they are? We have not seen floods of people suddenly deciding to go to Scotland.

9.45 pm

As for the other targets that the amendments address, the obvious question is: can they be achieved? They are not being achieved now. I had a written answer two weeks ago telling me that the current average time for processing was four years. I see the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) nodding—but many of those people applied before the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, and the Government whom he supported deliberately put them into a separate queue, and created a backlog by not processing their applications. They tried to speed up applications overall by dealing with recent applicants while letting the older applications stay in the queue.

Listening to the Home Secretary, I was a little worried that we might be starting to move down that road again, by creating a fast track for families with children, for whom target times will be met while leaving other people to sit and wait longer, or by dealing with new applicants fast and letting previous applicants wait.

It may be true that appeals are being dealt with within 13 weeks on average, but that is after a period in which relatively few decisions have come out of the Home Office. If decisions from the Home Office are made more quickly, so that there are more of them, there will be a question mark over whether the appeal authorities will be able to deal with the increased flow.

The other direct consequence of the Government's rejection of the Lords amendment is that we shall adopt the interim scheme. Hon. Members who have not yet done so should read the consultation paper, because it will definitely affect their local authorities. The scheme is a Government scheme in all but name, but will be run by local authorities.

Can we really expect local authorities to operate a voluntary scheme of dispersal? It may be voluntary for the local authorities, but not for asylum seekers, who will be told where to go. What will happen when different local authorities adopt different standards, and different tests of destitution are applied?

How will families survive? My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made great play of a commitment that he gave in the summer that families with children would not go into the support system. None the less, they are going into local authority support systems. He said that local authorities would be able to provide cash if they chose, but if they do not have to supply cash to families, that must mean—*[Interruption.]* I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend would confirm that local authorities will have to give cash to families, and will not have a choice.

Mr. Straw: I am glad to offer my hon. Friend reassurance. Under the Children Acts, under which support for families with children is provided, local authorities have the discretion to provide support either in cash or in kind, or a mixture of both. There is a wide range of provision, and we do not intend to change those arrangements when we bring in the interim arrangements that will apply between 1 December and 1 April.

Mr. Gerrard: The implications of that seem to be that there will be families with children who have to live on vouchers.

Much play has been made about what the voluntary sector will do. We are making all sorts of assumptions about what they will contribute in the new support scheme, such as supporting people who cannot be removed.

Mr. Clappison *rose—*

Mr. Gerrard: I want to finish my speech if the hon. Gentleman will let me, because I know that other people want to speak.

We are asking the voluntary sector to support people who may be destitute, but the support that they get may be taken into account in deciding whether they qualify as destitute for local authority purposes. That is important, because we are telling the voluntary sector that it will not be able to top up payments and give people additional help. If voluntary organisations do that, what they give will be taken into account in assessing destitution.

I am sorry to see us enacting the Bill in this form. I hope that I am wrong, and that in a year, 18 months or two years, my right hon. Friend will be able to demonstrate that we have a system, including a support system, that works. However, I am afraid that that will not happen and that we are passing a Bill that will create even worse chaos than exists now.

Mr. Allan: I commend the Bishop of Southwark's amendment. It was supported by a rainbow coalition of all parties and of none in the Upper kaufHouse. It is a tribute to the Bishop of Southwark and those in the upper House who took an independent view and were not tempted to view immigration matters as a sensitive political concern about which they must at all times be defensive. It sometimes appears that the other place is more willing to celebrate the contribution made by refugees to this country.

The Home Secretary appeared at one point to have seen the light when he referred to international conditions being the main driver behind the recent increase in asylum applications. That is the argument advanced by the Liberal Democrats in recent years, but the Home Secretary contradicted himself later by describing the cash benefits as the principal pull factor. The Home Secretary appears to argue either position as it suits him.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) said earlier that Liberal Democrats said nice things about the Home Secretary, but the hon. Gentleman himself played a constructive role in Committee. We formed an effective opposition in that Committee, but unfortunately the Home Secretary was not able to appreciate that.

We agreed with the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) when he said that the issue is primarily administrative, not legislative. Getting the administration right is the key, not simply banging through more legislation to pile on top of what we have had already. We were promised a fundamental review of all immigration legislation in this Bill, but other issues have been tagged on—not least the support system that we are debating. In our view, the Government are following the Conservatives' pattern of talking tough and legislating on immigration but then watching the system descend into further chaos. The support system in the Bill will continue that pattern.

The Lord Chancellor's comments about the likelihood of meeting the six-month target and recruiting the adjudicators have already been mentioned. The Home Secretary also said that the Government were aiming to meet the target, but that is meaningless in terms of holding the Government to account on those targets. We have also heard the evidence of the unions who represent workers in the immigration service. They appeared before the Special Standing Committee and said that even with the workers who were being recruited, the service would not be able to keep up with the growing backlog. The immigration service unions have since confirmed the problems faced in Croydon and elsewhere. We cannot therefore sit here and blithely accept the Home Secretary's assurances that he hopes to meet the target.

In the context of dispersal, it is vital that local authorities be given assurances about the targets, because they need to be able to plan. The local authority in Sheffield has voiced its concerns to me, and I am sure that other hon. Members will have had the same experience. How can local authorities plan for education and social services unless they know how long they will be responsible for applicants for asylum? Local health services have similar problems.

We provided a tremendous reception for Kosovans in my local authority, but that was based on full backing from the Home Office and a clear idea of what would happen. That will not happen under the new system and the asylum support directorate. The situation will be chaotic, and local authorities will find that difficult. However, we can be sure that they will continue to pick up the pieces for people who are desperate. The social services and other agencies, including the churches and the voluntary sector—often funded by the local authority for precisely that purpose—always do, whatever we put in the Bill about specific responsibilities for local authorities.

We are concerned that the Asylum Support Directorate is advertising under the Government scheme—not the one in the amendment—for other accommodation outside the consortium. How can a local authority plan to participate in such arrangements when advertisements are placed seeking other providers of accommodation in its area? Again, it may not always feel included in those discussions, nor able to contribute effectively to decisions about where people should end up.

The messages that have been given out have not always been helpful. I join in the commendations of the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) for the way in which he has taken a principled position, but it is clear that local authorities have been told that knife-wielding maniacs from Kent will be coming their way under the dispersal arrangements that the Government will impose. The publicity that has been created—and examples have been cited in the House—has been entirely counterproductive when it comes to getting local authorities outside London and the south-east to co-operate and participate. I very much regret some of the comments that have been made.

The figures given by the Home Secretary in rejecting the amendment were assertions, not facts. They are supported by no evidence other than the assertions of his officials. As happened with the police figures, the Home Secretary sometimes has to return to the House and say that the assertions made by his officials are not entirely what he would have wished to make had he checked them more carefully. We consider that the assertions behind the figures that the Home Secretary gave are based on supposition, in an attempt to make a case that he has decided already.

[Mr. Allan]

The hon. Member for Walthamstow rehearsed the arguments about the figures after the 1996 Act, when the choice was between cash benefits and nothing. If a deterrent effect existed, at most it was of about 10 per cent. initially, before fading altogether. The Home Secretary's figures ask us to assume a deterrent effect of 20 per cent., but we have no serious reason to take that as a fact.

The costs of the new system will be much higher—even the Government have admitted that administering vouchers will be more expensive. Officials from Kent county council told the Special Standing Committee that choosing the voucher option would be a disaster. Representatives from the Association of London Government said that the system would be expensive and difficult to administer.

However, the Bill proposes a central unit to administer that system throughout the country and to manage contracts that are supposed to cover details such as the changing of light bulbs and the provision of basic necessities. We are expected to take at face value the assertion that, in effect, the system will cost nothing, whereas a system involving social security benefits would be a full-cost operation. Clearly, rejecting the amendment and going down the route proposed in the Bill will involve an enormous cost.

We are also asked to take at face value the assertion that the administration system will work, yet we hear stories about how little communication exists between the asylum casework section and the new Asylum Support Directorate. The two operations must go hand in hand: the support system cannot work unless the casework is progressing effectively. I hope that the Home Secretary will be able to correct me, but I understand that the computer systems for the casework directorate and the Asylum Support Directorate are not compatible.

Major worries remain about the manipulation and management of the hearings that will allow people to come off the system within six months. There is no evidence that the problems of that self-created millennium bug have been solved, even though the clock is ticking and there are only five months to go until the system becomes operational in April 2000.

The key is to get the determination right and fair at the first attempt. That is the way to speed up the system and resolve the problems with it, but there is no evidence that the Government will be able to deliver that.

My noble Friend Earl Russell referred in another place to the Child Support Agency. The difficulties that he described with that agency bore uncanny parallels with the problems evident in the asylum system. He spoke of implementing simultaneously a major piece of legislation, a major administrative reorganisation and a major new computer system, and described the disaster that that could cause. That is uncannily reminiscent of what happened with the Passport Agency, and I regret that it may also happen with the Asylum Support Directorate.

If the amendment is rejected and the Government's bland assurances and unfounded assertions on this issue are accepted, I fear that we shall have to return to the House in a few years to consider yet more legislation, which will be sold to us as the magic wand to solve a problem that will have got worse in the intervening period.

10 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) talked about a magic wand. There is no such thing and I do not see one coming along.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) spoke with authority and compassion about the effect of the present system on genuine asylum seekers—the situation inherited from the Conservative party. Those of us who represent constituencies with large numbers of asylum seekers, as I do, are well aware of the impact on them of that administrative confusion.

The hon. Member for Hallam also says that he wants a system that is fair, but in my experience, where the system works, it is very fair. For example, last month I held a three and a half hour advice bureau, which dealt mostly with people who were here and had been given indefinite or considerable periods of leave to remain. They were mainly Somalis. They had no complaints about the system that had allowed them to be here as asylum seekers. Nor did they have any complaints about Manchester city council. That council has not had any complaints about the situation—it has done remarkable things for asylum seekers, particularly those from Somalia but also those from Kosovo. We have a large number of people from Kosovo in my constituency.

So many people who have been asylum seekers come to my advice bureau not because they are here or are not being sustained, but because the system has become so clogged with bogus asylum seekers that they cannot get the processing that they need—for example, with travel documents and verification of their presence here.

One of my cases concerns a woman from Croatia who is an asylum seeker. She needs verification of her status from the Home Office because she cannot obtain the benefits to which she is entitled. She is getting cheques on a weekly basis, at best. That is because she has been waiting for 15 months simply for a reply from the Home Office, owing to the misguided legislation of the Conservative party which has resulted in chaos in the system—utter chaos for applications and appeals. As a result, people with genuine and important problems cannot get responses.

Week after week I have to deal with the problems of people not only from Somalia, but from Sierra Leone, Algeria, Libya—an appalling case involving a man who had had a frightful wound inflicted on him—Iraq and many other countries. They have no problem with being in this country. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has treated all of them very well indeed. The problem is that they are in a state of limbo because the system is clogged with bogus asylum seekers.

Last weekend, I had a discussion with senior members of the race relations sector in Manchester. As it happens, it was at an event organised by Asian constituents. They told me of their total support for this legislation. They do not support it because they are happy with it—who can be happy with legislation that has to introduce such Gordian measures? My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is not happy that he has had to introduce it. They support it because they believe that it is the best way to cut open the system and rid it of the awful consultants and solicitors who have battened and leached on certain people, urging them to apply for asylum when they are not eligible and making money out of human misery.

That human misery is twofold. There is the human misery of the genuine asylum seekers who are not having their cases dealt with efficiently or satisfactorily, and that of the people who have been induced to apply for asylum who are never in a million years going to get it but whose cases must be considered as if they are genuine, just in case they turn out to be such.

That is the unhappy dilemma facing my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. He is using better endeavours—better than any Home Secretary whom I have encountered in my 29 years in this place—to deal with problems that are often insoluble, always vexatious and sometimes—far too often—exacerbated by the exploitation of the system by people who are exploited by consultants. If there is one reason why I want this Bill on the statute book, it is so that the measures against the bogus consultants and exploitative solicitors can be brought into action. I name Thornhill Ince in Manchester as a firm of solicitors whose exploitation of members of the ethnic minority communities is absolutely scandalous.

I wish, as does my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, that he did not have to introduce the systems that are in this Bill, but I see no alternative. There is certainly no alternative in the amendment that he is asking the House to reject. The conditions that it would impose are not only unfulfillable but would make the situation worse. They would create a vicious circle that would not improve matters for a single human being.

Where I agree totally with my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow is on his emphasis on the fact that these people are all individuals suffering from misery, fear, apprehension and concern about their relatives abroad whom they may or may not see. We must devise not the best, but the least bad system. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is not asking for plaudits for having produced something that, in the words of the hon. Member for Hallam, will wave a magic wand. He deserves credit for understanding the issues in a way that no Home Secretary whom I have known has understood them, and for his honest efforts to achieve a solution. He may regard that as faint praise, but praise it is meant to be. I am not happy that we have to have such conditions in the Bill, but if they can cut through the logjam and discourage the consultants and the solicitors, he has some chance of making the situation better. That is why the Bill's registration system is so important.

Mr. Singh: Does my right hon. Friend believe that vouchers are a more efficient, compassionate and humane way of supporting asylum seekers than cash payments?

Mr. Kaufman: I do not believe that vouchers are more compassionate. I do not know whether they will be more efficient. They are worth trying, particularly on the discriminatory basis that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary described. I cannot say that I am delirious with pleasure at the idea that the Bill contains them, but the situation must be solved because of the many people who are suffering seriously from what my right hon. Friend inherited from the Conservative Government.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Despite his inaccurate criticisms of the record of the previous Government, I derived a good deal of encouragement from the speech of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The implication, when one cut through much of the language of his speech, was a recognition at last from a Labour Member that the challenge that we face is how to deter undeserving applicants for political asylum so that applicants genuinely fleeing persecution can have their claims dealt with speedily and effectively, and can be given the asylum to which they are entitled.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: I have very little time. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I will not give way again.

Mr. Corbyn: Before the right hon. and learned Gentleman goes any further down this road, can he tell us where he gets any evidence that any change in the number of people fleeing to Britain, or anywhere else in Europe, to seek a place of safety under the terms of the 1951 Geneva convention has taken place as a result of a system of payments of benefits either in cash or in kind?

Mr. Howard: I am coming to exactly that point. In view of the criticisms made by the right hon. Member for Gorton and repeatedly made by the Home Secretary and other Home Office Ministers, I want to begin this necessarily brief speech by putting the record straight.

These are the figures. In 1996—the last full year of the previous Government's term—the number of asylum seekers was just under 30,000—29,640. In the previous year, the number was almost 44,000—43,965 to be exact. That reduction was a direct result of the 1996 legislation for which I was responsible and the associated benefit changes for which my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) was responsible.

If we compare the figures month by month—a much fairer comparison since the changes were not in force for the whole of 1996—the percentage reduction was even greater than that represented by the figures that I have just quoted. If, for example, we compare May 1996 with May 1995, the reduction was almost 50 per cent. The statistics are a matter of record. If the Home Secretary wants to challenge them, I will give way to him.

At present, the number of those seeking asylum is soaring and out of control; the backlog is soaring and out of control. That is a direct consequence of the decisions of the Home Secretary. He had the remedy in his own hands. He could have implemented in full the measures contained in the 1996 Act and the associated benefit changes, but he chose not to do so. The consequences were predictable and they have come to pass.

I hope that the measures that the Home Secretary is now putting in place will succeed. I give him this personal assurance. I do not join him in criticising the Lords amendment this evening simply to embarrass him and make mischief for him among some of his hon. Friends. I hope that his measures succeed. If they do, it will be greatly to the benefit of my constituents in Folkestone and those in neighbouring parts of east Kent.

The effect of the Home Secretary's measures would be significantly diminished if the Lords amendment were to stand. There is concern among hon. Members of all parties about the backlog. The key to reducing the backlog is to reduce the number of undeserving applicants. That, too, is proved by the record of the previous Government.

[Mr. Howard]

In 1995, just over 27,000 decisions on asylum were made—27,005, to be precise. In 1996, after the changes that I have described, that number increased to almost 39,000—38,960. The number of decisions in 1996 exceeded the number of applications for asylum by almost 10,000. The backlog was being substantially reduced, which was a far cry from the situation that we face at present.

The Lords amendment would not help to remedy the present situation. Indeed, it would be counterproductive, so the Home Secretary and my right hon. and hon. Friends are right not to support it. I am sorry that we shall not have the opportunity to vote for the modest amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). I do not quite understand why the Government do not accept it. However, I am serious in my hope that the Government's measures succeed. If they do not, I hope that the Government will not shrink from reconsidering the matter and, indeed, from paying some further attention to the measures that achieved such success in 1996. I shall be ready and available to help the Home Secretary, if and when that moment comes.

10.15 pm

Ms Abbott: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak briefly in support of Lords amendment No. 135. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said that if the amendment were allowed to stand, it would set unfulfillable criteria. On the contrary, the criteria set by the amendment for the average times of determination were those that Ministers assured us over and over again—in the House and in Committee—could and would be met. I do not want to detain the House on this point, but it may be helpful if I repeat the words of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on Report. He said:

"I also ask my hon. Friend to accept that I will be responsible to the House, and to Members on each side of it, if the system fails to meet the target"—

that is, the target for the average times. He continued:

"I shall take a very close and personal interest in whether that target will be met. It will be in nobody's interest, least of all mine, to press the start button to begin the process and then to discover the applications are routinely not taking two months".—[*Official Report*, 16 June 1999; Vol. 333, c. 475.]

However, tonight, the Home Secretary is presenting us with exactly that scenario. He says that, come what may, he will press the start button and begin the process. I have not yet heard a single assurance from Ministers about whether they can meet the two months and the six months time limits that we were assured, over and over again, they would reach. The Home Secretary tried to claim that there was never any connection between the introduction of the support system and the time targets. However, the Home Office document, "Asylum Seekers Support", published in March 1999, states:

"The proposed provision is set at 70 per cent. of the equivalent income support because the asylum support scheme is intended to be on a short-term basis, safety net arrangement, and it should be possible to live on these amounts for short periods only."

There was much anxiety and concern about the support arrangements among my Labour colleagues and, over and over again, the Home Secretary reassured people that the arrangements were meant to be only short term. However, he now wants to strike out Lords amendment No. 135, and he cannot provide us with a single, practical assurance that those targets will be met.

Mr. Straw: With great respect to my hon. Friend, I have provided a most important assurance, which I also gave on Report, that, in respect of families with children, we will not introduce the voucher-based system of support until we are clear that we are meeting—for most cases, although not for all cases, as I have always made clear—the two plus four target. Moreover—I am sorry if my hon. Friend did not hear what was said, because she was certainly present—we are already rolling out arrangements to fast-track families with children. I gave details about that in respect of the first 600 such people who had made applications in October.

Ms Abbott: As my right hon. Friend will be aware, the concern is about the interim arrangements and what they will mean. I repeat to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench the concern about people whose cases are currently in the backlog. It is one thing to say that they will not be subject to false dispersal, but the transitional arrangements will have to be extremely carefully made, because although those people might not be subject to dispersal, they might lose their housing benefit. In practice, that would mean that they could no longer stay in their current homes.

I have only a few minutes in which to speak, but I put it to Ministers that, if their assurances about meeting the time targets for the resolution of those cases meant anything, they have nothing to fear from the thinking behind Lords amendment No. 135.

Ministers come to the Dispatch Box and say, wide-eyed, that they are putting time and effort into ensuring the right outcome. That might cut ice with Opposition Members who have no experience of the immigration and nationality directorate, for they do not know about the disastrous introduction of the new computer system or about the boxes of unopened files. However, after 12 long years dealing with the IND as a Member of Parliament, I wanted to hear broader assurances. Yes, families will not move straight to the voucher system, but what about single persons? What about the interim arrangements?

The amendment deals with the practicalities of the legislation and the potential to implement it fairly and efficiently. I know that many of my hon. Friends are now poised to troop through the Lobby in support of the Government, but I predict that the Bill will be like the Child Support Act 1991 in the following respect: before too long, it will be hard to find Labour Members who have any clear recollection of ever having supported it.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I welcome amendment (a), tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), which makes much more sense than Lords amendment No. 135, which was proposed by the Lord Bishop of Southwark and accepted in another place. The message to all asylum applicants, genuine or otherwise, should not be of the continued availability of cash benefits, but of the Government having to live up to their promises of putting in place, in good working order, targeted systems for processing applications. That is why my right hon. Friend is right to try to place the Home Secretary under a clear obligation to deliver on his promises of greater efficiency.

If there were time, I would make a further suggestion to the Home Secretary, which is that—

It being twenty-two minutes past Eight o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to the Order this day.*

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 331, Noes 60.

Division No. 316] **[10.22 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*

Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Clwyd, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Öpik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Stunell, Andrew
Swinney, John
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Willis, Phil
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and
Mr. Donald Gorrie.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 1, after clause 3, to insert the following new clause—*Accommodation for those temporarily admitted or released from detention*—

(". The Secretary of State may provide, or arrange for the provision of, facilities for the accommodation of persons—

(a) temporarily admitted to the United Kingdom under paragraph 21 of Schedule 2 to the 1971 Act;

(b) released from detention under that paragraph; or

(c) released on bail from detention under any provision of the Immigration Acts.")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take amendment (a) and Lords amendment No. 329.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I support amendment (a), which relates to an amendment first introduced in the House of Lords. I ask the House to pay attention to the debate as this issue was never raised when the Bill was on the Floor of this House.

The issue was not raised during the Bill's passage through the House and was mentioned for the first time when the legislation was on Report in the other place. To put it bluntly, the issue is whether we should introduce a new power of house arrest specifically for people who come to this country seeking asylum. Such people would have no convictions for any offence. They would be detained through no actions of their own. They would have no record of absconding. They would do nothing more than arrive on our shores. Should people who come to Britain thinking that we are the home of liberty be told that they may stay, but only on the condition that their liberty is restricted immediately?

There are two hugely important interrelated issues surrounding this new clause and the amendment that my hon. Friend and I have tabled. First, how do we justify detaining people in this [illegible] and how will we add new powers of detention? Secondly, how do we treat people who come to this country as refugees? How do we treat those who have decided that this is the place where they will seek sanctuary? What signals should we send? What is Britain's reputation in this area?

It is no coincidence that I can commend to hon. Members an article that appears on page 19 of today's edition of *The Guardian*—I shall refer to it only briefly. The article, entitled "Welcome them", is written by the director of the King's Fund, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, and is about refugees. She begins the article by relating her family's experience, and states:

"My mother, my uncle, one set of grandparents, and innumerable other relations, came to the UK as refugees from Hitler's Germany in the 1930s . . .

That childhood made me realise something of what it is to be a refugee, to be torn from your home, to feel grateful for asylum, to think of 'home' as more than one place, to yearn for one's country of birth, despite one's resentment and anger at it, as one grows old."

She continues:

"The devil is in the detail"—

of the Bill that we are debating tonight—

"but refugees and asylum seekers have not always been a popular group. That is why it is essential that parliament takes a very close look at this bill, and distinguishes between measures designed to deter false asylum seekers and those which will have a harmful effect on genuine refugees, who have surely suffered enough already."

Rabbi Neuberger concludes by making the point—which was mentioned across the House, in Committee and in another place—that Britain has gained hugely from people who have come here as refugees. Many of our great academic talents were refugees; many innovators in the field of science this century were refugees from Europe and from further afield. If we agree to the new clause introduced by the Government in the Lords without the amendment that my hon. Friend and I suggest, we risk putting off other refugees who may come to this country from the former Yugoslavia, the horn of Africa or elsewhere.

Current immigration laws are technical—and I hope that hon. Members will bear with me. In the other place, Ministers got into a terrible muddle describing what they were seeking to achieve. They introduced amendments on Report and agreed that it would be better to take amendment No. 1 first and to consider the consequential amendment to it in a later debate. Ministers then withdrew the second amendment and reintroduced it on Third Reading, pushing it through against the strong advice of a House of Lords Select Committee.

I turn now to what the Bill proposes. It adds to the existing powers in the Immigration Act 1971 which allow people to be detained. Paragraph 21 of schedule 2 of that Act says:

"A person liable to detention or detained under paragraph 16 above may, under the written authority of an immigration officer, be temporarily admitted to the United Kingdom without being detained or be released from detention; but this shall not prejudice a later exercise of the power to detain him."

However, the paragraph continues:

"So long as a person is at large in the United Kingdom by virtue of this paragraph, he shall be subject to such restrictions as to residence"—

and to employment or occupation—

"and as to reporting to the police or an immigration officer as may from time to time be notified to him in writing by an immigration officer."

There are, therefore, existing powers under the 1971 Act.

The Government advise us that all that the Act allows by way of detention is that which

"is necessary to maintain contact and prevent absconding".

However, that is never made clear in the Act or anywhere else. The Government have introduced a new clause in amendment No. 1, which says:

"The Secretary of State may provide, or arrange for the provision of, facilities for the—

this is rather disingenuously put—

"accommodation of persons . . . temporarily admitted to the United Kingdom under paragraph 21 . . . released from detention under that paragraph; or . . . released on bail from detention under any provision of the Immigration Acts."

That clause does not reveal what is behind the proposal. One must look to Lords amendment No. 329, which amends schedule 13 of the Bill. It says:

"The provisions that may be included in restrictions as to residence imposed under sub-paragraph (2) include provisions of such a description as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State."

That points towards regulations to be laid in the future.

The amendment continues:

"The regulations may"—

it does not say that they must—

"among other things, provide for the inclusion of provisions".

That means that the regulations are not limited to those provisions, but they may include them. They may be provisions

"prohibiting residence in one or more particular areas",

or

"requiring the person concerned to reside in accommodation provided under"

the relevant section of the Bill, and

"prohibiting him from being absent from that accommodation except in accordance with the restrictions imposed on him."

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): It seems reasonable.

Mr. Hughes: The Minister says that it seems reasonable, but if Ministers are saying that it is reasonable to put newly arrived asylum seekers under house arrest for no reason other than that they have arrived here, the Government stand condemned by their own definition of what is reasonable. We cannot argue that the provisions are reasonable, and the Government should not argue that they are reasonable. The Select Committee in the House of Lords which considered the Bill certainly did not believe that the provisions were reasonable. Why, then, are they before us?

The Minister said that the aim of the provisions is

"to prevent potential public order problems".

So we are going to lock up or put under house arrest asylum seekers to prevent public order problems. But who is likely to cause such problems? As I understand it, public order problems this summer have not, by and large, been caused by asylum seekers, but have stemmed from the reaction of others to asylum seekers. Public order problems are not often caused by people who arrive with their children from a country far away, with no money but with the hope that they will be received. They are caused by people who think that there may be an invasion behind asylum seekers. That is dangerous enough, but the Government say that the measure is necessary to allow full and rapid consideration of asylum seekers' claims and to enable rapid decisions to be taken, in days rather than weeks. For that, flexible provisions are needed.

10.45 pm

My colleagues and I have tabled a simple amendment. We do not like the original amendment. We simply tried to get the House to recognise that if we are to introduce the measure, there should be a limit on the time for which it applies. All we are asking is that while his application is looked into, an asylum seeker with no previous record of offending and no previous visits to the United Kingdom

[Mr. Hughes]

should not be required, by regulations that we have not seen, to be under house arrest for more than 10 days. That should be long enough for someone to decide his status and how to deal with him.

Ministers were put on the defensive by peers in many corners of their lordships' House. I pay tribute to those from the Liberal Democrat Benches, including the Baroness Williams, the Lords Avebury and Goodhart—Lord Goodhart particularly, with his legal experience—and the Earl Russell. The Government said that the asylum seekers would be free to come and go, but on further exploration it turns out that that means free to come and go only during the day. At night they will be back at base, wherever base is, and in whatever form of detention will be decided for them.

Not only could asylum seekers be under detention at night, but—this is the real criticism—the power can continue indefinitely. The contributions of the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and others in the previous debate are relevant. If we pass the amendment unaltered by our amendment, we shall give a power allowing people to be detained indefinitely, placed under house arrest indefinitely and restricted indefinitely, while their claims are processed. The hon. Lady knows, as do I and anyone who deals every day with immigration cases, that the promise that a claim will be dealt with quickly, even if the promise is made in a letter or a telephone call and sometimes even if it is made by a Minister, does not necessarily mean that the claim is dealt with quickly.

Colleagues in the other place tried to explore ways in which the amendment might be restricted. The Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Deregulation, which considered the proposal, said that it was a form of house arrest. That is the Select Committee's phrase; it is not a party political phrase. The Select Committee suggested that various amendments should be made by the Government. First, it suggested that the purpose of the restriction should be specified in the Bill—for example, that it is in the interests of public order. No purpose is specified in the Bill, which makes it a dangerously wide provision. Secondly, the Select Committee suggested that if the amendment is justified, it should be for a single purpose. There is no such restriction in the Bill. Thirdly, the Select Committee argued that the restrictions must be reasonable, and that that should be specifically stated. Nothing in the Bill provides that natural justice qualification.

The Government did make two concessions. They conceded that the measure would have to be compatible with article 3 of the European convention on human rights, and that a Minister would have to certify that it was compatible. However, imagine if someone is placed, we know not where, and told that he cannot go out at night and that he must stay there. Even after next autumn, when the European convention on human rights is part of English law, as my colleagues and I have wanted for many years, is it reasonable that it should be up to an asylum seeker to apply to the courts to rule whether he should be held?

Should that be the way in which we conduct our business? Should the assumption be that a newly arrived refugee should have to go to court to establish his rights? My colleagues and I think not. Although the Government have made concessions, enforcing the provision's human rights compatibility may be much more difficult than envisaged. It is sometimes difficult enough for hon. Members to enforce their rights. If we think that that will be easy for people arriving with no English, no money and no knowledge of British systems, we are deceiving ourselves.

Lords amendment No. 329 asks for regulations to be made by affirmative resolution. The Government have agreed and we welcome that.

Tonight, for the first time, we are being asked to consider a new clause and a new schedule. For the first time, we will introduce into British law a new form of specialised detention, different from the 1971 Act and different from all the other provisions

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): A curfew.

Mr. Hughes: As my hon. Friend says, it will effectively be a curfew; a curfew for asylum seekers. It could be more than a curfew; it could restrict a person to specific accommodation for an indefinite period. I hope that the House will support the amendment to ensure that that period, if we have to have it, should be limited to a maximum of 10 days. I hope that the House will say that it is not enough for the Government to resist the amendment on the basis of what will happen if a person leaves the country after 10 days, only to return. The answer to that is that the 10 days will begin to run again.

I also hope that the House will say that it is not enough to trust the Government on legislation that has been introduced at the last moment and criticised by Select Committees, and which lacks adequate definition. The job of Parliament is to make sure that we get the law right rather than trust the Government. It will be too late when people discover that, as from tomorrow, Britain has new detention powers, new curfews and new powers of house arrest. I hope that the Government accept the amendment.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): It might be for the convenience of the House if I say that I shall accept the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) to Lords amendment No. 139, to which we shall come later.

I start on a note of agreement with the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). Much of what he said was completely wrong, and I shall seek to convince him and the House of the error of his ways, but he is right to talk of Britain's proud history of accepting genuine asylum seekers; of granting refugees that status. He is also right to talk about the enormous contribution, not only over the years but over a vast period, that refugees have made to Britain's public, social and economic life.

But nothing is more devaluing than the rise in the number of applications that are completely ill-founded. Like me, the hon. Gentleman is a London Member of Parliament, and we are well aware of the situation. The greatest enemy of the genuine asylum seeker is the unfounded application.

The purpose of their lordship's amendments, taken together, is to provide a power to extend by regulation the residence conditions which may be imposed when those seeking leave to enter or remain in Britain are given temporary admission.

As the House will be aware—we discussed this at length earlier today—there has been a substantial increase in asylum applications at our ports and in-country. The average number of applications each month from July to September was nearly 7,000, about 60 per cent. higher than for the same period in 1998. The majority of those applications—about two thirds—will not qualify for refugee status or exceptional leave to remain. A number of those refused will have made claims that are manifestly unfounded. We believe that, subject to providing full opportunity to examine the individual circumstances of each case, action is needed to ensure that such claims are resolved more quickly. If there is a point on which every Member of the House is absolutely agreed this evening, it is that we have to speed up the system. We have to take that challenge on board.

Mr. Gerrard: If facilities are to be used by people whose asylum claims are manifestly unfounded, and if they may be expected to live at such facilities from the moment that they make an application, who will judge whether a claim is manifestly unfounded and on what basis will such a judgment be made?

Mrs. Roche: I think that my hon. Friend is talking about the reception centre that we shall establish in the new year. I shall come on to that. Since taking on my new ministerial responsibilities, I have spent a long time at our ports listening to some of the claims and it is quite clear fairly early on which applications can be dealt with speedily and which will clearly take longer to process.

My hon. Friend has brought me on to my next point—our recently announced plans to establish a reception centre at Oakington, near Cambridge, to help to deal with those claims on which it appears that a rapid decision can be taken. Such applicants will be required to stay at the centre for a short period—about seven days—while their claim is decided. However, I want to impress on the House that the arrangements at Oakington do not depend on or reflect the provision of the amendments. Applicants will be required to stay at Oakington under existing immigration powers to detain. A purpose of the amendments is to enable us to develop a wider range of options and, if necessary, different reception arrangements to deal with a range of circumstances.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Minister has made it clear that the Oakington proposals are different. I understand that, which is why I did not refer to them. If the Government plan to use present law and will use Oakington or anywhere else for reception purposes, why do they not at least consider whether present law may be sufficient before—to use her words—they extend the arrangements to provide a wider range of powers? The danger is that the powers will be so wide that they will be a threat to liberty rather than helpful to the Government.

Mrs. Roche: I disagree; the proposed powers are not a threat to liberty and, if the hon. Gentleman contains his impatience a little longer, I shall describe them. Given the situation that we face, he will appreciate that the Bill must provide a range of options so that we can deal with different circumstances. I shall explain to him exactly why we need the amendments.

Lords amendment No. 1 does not deal with the question whether additional powers to impose such residence conditions should be available. It simply provides a clear statutory basis for the provision of accommodation by the Secretary of State to persons on temporary admission. In that sense, it is consequential on Lords amendment No. 329, which the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) discussed in his opening remarks. On that amendment, there is already power under the Immigration Act 1971 to impose residence conditions on those granted temporary admission, but our legal advice is that, as currently framed, those restrictions should be the ones necessary to maintain contact and prevent absconding. That is exactly what the hon. Gentleman said.

The objectives are important, but too narrow. The problems created by the large influx of asylum seekers over the summer months suggest that we might need wider powers to impose residence conditions, which are necessary not just to maintain contact but to prevent potential public order problems. That applies not to just one section of applicants but to everybody. It is rightly a role for Government to relieve pressure on local services or to ensure full and rapid consideration of claims.

11 pm

Mr. Gapes: I seek clarification. Is my hon. Friend saying that, in order to make a dispersal policy work, it is necessary to implement the new provision, and that it is not possible to implement a dispersal policy on the basis of existing regulations?

Mrs. Roche: The matters are different. The dispersal policy clearly fits the asylum support arrangements that we are implementing. The power is designed for particular circumstances, so that there is some flexibility. I shall expand on my remarks.

Lords amendment No. 329 would enable regulations to prohibit residence in one or more areas by those on temporary admission. I should make it absolutely clear to the House and to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey—if I may have his attention—that we do not envisage using the power routinely. We envisage using it only to relieve extreme pressures on certain areas in extreme circumstances.

Fiona Mactaggart: I am concerned that the reception centres envisaged, especially Oakington, which is not near any expert immigration advice centre, might have high concentrations of asylum seekers who do not necessarily have access to either appropriate health care facilities or qualified expert legal advice. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that, if there are to be such facilities, she will guarantee that the residents in them have access to legal advice from properly qualified people, and to health care?

Mrs. Roche: I am happy to give my hon. Friend, who I know takes a very close interest and has great expertise in these matters, my full assurance. We shall certainly provide such services and we are already in discussion about them. It is very important that both services are available.

Mr. Clappison: I apologise for not being present for the beginning of the debate. Has the Minister consulted the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, and if so, what did it say?

Mrs. Roche: We have certainly spoken to the Refugee Council and the Refugee Legal Centre. We hope to get

[Mrs. Roche]

the centre up and running by the new year. We shall certainly ensure that we consult all voluntary organisations that have an interest.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I should like to put two points to the Minister; one follows the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison). First, if the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture has not yet been consulted, will she assure the House that it will be? That was one of the issues that came up in the Special Standing Committee; I know that there is a fund of Government good will on it. Secondly, will she confirm that she and her advisers had not thought of the new provisions, particularly those in Lords amendment No. 329, when the Bill was previously before the House of Commons, and that they are not trying to ambush the Bill? How much of the proposal is designed to be a deterrent, how much is designed to prevent absconding and how much is to do with what one might call public order?

Mrs. Roche: We are of course very anxious to consult. As the hon. Gentleman will know, we have very good relationships with the voluntary sector, which has been very helpful on the voluntary arrangements. Of course we want to ensure that we keep in close touch with it. In fact, I have made it perfectly clear to representatives of the Refugee Legal Centre and the Refugee Council that they are very welcome to visit Oakington. We shall allow that visit to be made as soon as we are able.

We have seen a change in the process of asylum seeking since the Bill began its passage. It is right that when a complex Bill of this nature is under consideration, the Government should keep under constant review exactly what is going on, and what flexibility we need to build in.

I was talking to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey about the power that we are discussing in connection with the Lords amendment that he seeks to amend. That power applies to people who have been granted temporary admission to this country. Temporary admission is not a form of leave to enter, and that is an important legal factor to keep in mind.

In law, temporary admission is an alternative to detention while someone's application to stay is being considered, or pending their return abroad. It is not unreasonable, therefore, that where the maintenance of public order or viable public services requires, we should be able to prohibit such people from residing in certain areas.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The hon. Lady is normally very direct in her speech, and explains clearly what she has in mind. Why is she talking so elliptically tonight, and speaking in riddles about threats to public order? What are those threats to which she keeps referring as if they were self-evident? My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has made it plain that refugees, whether individually or even in the numbers that she has mentioned as having arrived this summer, do not constitute a threat to public order. Wherein is the mischief that she seeks to remedy?

Mrs. Roche: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks, which I will treat as a compliment. Usually people do not say that I speak directly, they simply say that I am the opposite of subtle—in other words, that I am blunt. That apart, the right hon. Gentleman knows full well what the situation has been this summer. One does not seek to blame any group, but it is undeniable that there has been tension in some parts of the country. It is wrong for him to deny that. It is no good for asylum seekers themselves to enter a situation in which there could be difficulties.

We are talking about use in certain circumstances, not routine use, of a power that could be very useful. Clearly this is a sensitive area; I do not pretend that it is not. The right hon. Gentleman must be realistic about the situation.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Lords amendment was introduced after the summer recess—presumably as a reaction to a perception that there were public order problems in Kent. We have no evidence that that was the reason, but it must be the presumption. Whom is the amendment intended to protect? The asylum seekers? The residents? If either of those, the idea that we need to take people who would otherwise be admitted, and have the power to put them collectively and indefinitely under house arrest, has never been justified by any argument either before or after the summer.

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman is not doing himself justice. We are not talking about house arrest. When we talk about public order and public protection, we are talking about protecting everybody. *[Interruption.]* One of the Liberal Democrats repeats, "Everybody?" Of course I mean everybody. We want to maintain good public order, but it is not for public order reasons alone that we need the flexibility; it is also to relieve the pressure on social services, which in some areas has been intense.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Does my hon. Friend envisage circumstances in which children will be accommodated in any of the facilities referred to in this debate?

Mrs. Roche: Yes, and I shall explain our plans for Oakington. It will be a reception centre for which we shall use our present powers under immigration legislation. It will provide accommodation for single people and for families. I can assure my hon. Friend that the accommodation for families will be separate. I have already told my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) that health services will be available, as well as appropriate facilities for families and access to legal advice. We have no wish to divide families and we envisage that people will stay at the centre for only short periods—in their interest and in ours.

Mr. Corbyn: Can my hon. Friend confirm that Oakington will, in effect, be a detention centre, with all the powers that that implies, as well as security and guards? Although legal advice, social services and health care may be available, it will still be a detention centre, like Campsfield and the others.

Mrs. Roche: Yes, it will be a detention centre in terms of its designation. We have said that from the beginning and I have made it clear that we will use existing powers to run it. There will be security, but it will be very relaxed

and, in certain circumstances, people will be able to leave. In any event, people will stay for only short periods so that their applications can be processed.

I share a constituency boundary with my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and we probably have similar casework, so he will know that the most important thing that we can do is speed up the application process. If people come here with manifestly unfounded claims, the worst thing that we could do is to keep them in the system for a long time. That is why it is important to deal with the claims speedily, and to deal with the people humanely. That is why we are providing Oakington on the basis I have outlined. Because it will be categorised as a detention centre, it will be subject to organised inspection visits under the new arrangements.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): If my hon. Friend accepts that stays at Oakington will be short, why are the Government not prepared to accept the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)? Can she also assure us that if any children are kept in such facilities for more than seven days, they will be allowed access to local schools and education?

Mrs. Roche: I shall deal later with amendment (a), but it is our aim to keep people at the centre for short periods only. If we want to use Oakington as a processing centre in terms of applications made by claimants, it is in our interests that people are there for a short time.

Lords amendment No. 329 would enable conditions to be imposed requiring a person to reside in accommodation provided by the Secretary of State. Those provisions do not relate in any way to the use of detention or what is proposed at Oakington. On the contrary, the aim of the amendment is to provide greater flexibility in the use of temporary admission. It would be possible, with the new powers that we seek, to develop reception facilities in which persons granted temporary admission would be required to reside, but where they would be free to come and go during the day as they wished. Applicants would be required to remain at the accommodation overnight and to be present at certain times for interview or other purposes, to enable prompt consideration of their claims. Residence would therefore be for short periods.

11.15 pm

We believe that it is necessary to proceed with a power to make regulations. That is what the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey was talking about. The use of those powers would depend on changing events and pressures. One of the problems with the current system of control is that we cannot respond to the pace of events quickly or flexibly enough. The Bill is intended to provide a more modern, flexible system. The regulations will ensure that additional residence requirements are proportionate and relevant to the circumstances that may arise.

I want to mention again an important matter raised earlier by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. Under the Human Rights Act 1998, any regulations made must comply with the European convention on human rights, which would authorise the imposition of additional descriptions of the conditions only so far as they could be justified.

As I have said before, the Government recognise that this is a sensitive area. That is why we accept the recommendation of the House of Lords Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Deregulation that the regulations should be made subject to the affirmative procedure. It is absolutely right that they should be, as that will ensure that there is full and careful scrutiny of the use of the powers. Parliament will have to be satisfied that, wherever the powers are used, they are proportionate and necessary to achieve the stated objective.

As the Government announced in another place, Ministers moving regulations subject to the affirmative procedure will always inform the House about whether they are satisfied that the instrument is compatible with rights under the European convention.

I shall deal briefly with amendment (a), tabled by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, which would limit single periods of residence at accommodation provided by the Secretary of State to a maximum of 10 days. It would not prevent someone from being required to reside at such accommodation for additional periods of up to 10 days, provided that those periods were not consecutive.

The whole purpose of the new provisions is to provide greater flexibility in the use of temporary admission. We must keep it in mind that we are talking about a requirement to reside in a particular place, but with a minimum of restrictions on a person's ability to come and go during the day. I do not believe that such requirements are onerous or unfair. Any restriction could be imposed only after approval by Parliament.

Mr. Simon Hughes: With respect, the Minister is saying nothing new. I have two questions for her. Why have the Government taken some of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Delegated Powers and Deregulation, but not the others? Above all, why is she arguing for flexibility in the law—in the Act of Parliament that this Bill will become—when the purpose of legislation is to be clear so that people know where they stand? Never before has it been argued that we should have flexible legislation as opposed to flexible policy.

Mrs. Roche: I understand the point, but the Government will examine the recommendations from another place carefully to determine what we agree with. Given that this is such a sensitive area, we think that approach is the right one.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Is that the Minister's response?

Mrs. Roche: It is the only response that I shall give.

Mr. Keetch: It is not a very good one.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Roche: No. I apologise for having detained the House at some length, but I hope that I have dealt—

Mr. Heath: This is important.

Mrs. Roche: Okay, I will take one more intervention.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who has been patient given the number of interventions. Her

[Mr. Heath]

argument for the amendment is that it will in some way prevent public disorder. Is she saying that the state of expectation of such disorder will extend beyond a 10-day period? In which case, I am sorry but I do not follow her argument.

Mrs. Roche: I do not want to be critical, but I think that the hon. Gentleman is muddled. We are talking about two different things. I appreciate that these are sensitive areas and that it is a difficult subject.

In conclusion, I must reinforce the fact that Oakington will be very different. There will be minimal physical security and a very relaxed regime. Case workers will be on the site to deal with applications. Clearly, that does not happen at detention centres at the moment.

To end as I began, it is in all our interests—the public, the House and claimants alike—to speed up the process, which is what the amendments are about.

Mr. Lidington: I share the Minister's concern about the need to reduce the backlogs as rapidly as possible and speed up decision taking. Given the number of applicants coming into the country at present, I sympathise with Ministers' desire to have additional powers to help them cope with the practical problems. Will the hon. Lady spell out in a little more detail the Government's approach to two matters that have not been adequately covered? If she is unable to explain that in her reply, perhaps she could do so later in correspondence. The first matter is the level of safeguards that the law would provide for people sent to particular places under the terms of the schedule. Secondly, will she throw a little more light on how the Government intend people to be selected to become subject to the new powers?

On safeguards, the Minister rightly drew a distinction between powers of detention under the Immigration Act 1971 and the new powers that would be introduced by the amendments. The powers in the 1971 Act are subject to various safeguards—inspections, a monitoring system, committees of visitors and statutory arrangements for disciplinary rules. The Bill provides that someone who is detained would have the right to bail hearings at appropriate times during detention.

While the Government have said consistently that the powers that they propose to introduce by regulation under Lords amendment No. 329 envisage a limited period of residence by an asylum seeker in a place designated by the Secretary of State, as I read the text of the schedule, it sets out no limit to the period of time that the right hon. Gentleman could require someone to live at a particular place. No minimum time seems to be provided for, other than that which the Minister chooses to include in regulations.

Also, it seems that someone could be detained for quite a long time without any sort of judicial oversight. On the face of things, that puts an asylum seeker held subject to those conditions, which the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) described as a curfew, in an inferior position to that of someone held in formal detention.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman mentioned curfew, but one of our major concerns is that Lords amendment No. 329 talks about being prohibited from being absent. It says nothing about night time or day time. As we read it, it could mean any time at all. Our concern goes much wider than simply having a night time curfew.

Mr. Lidington: One problem is that the powers that Lords amendment No. 329 gives the Secretary of State are wide. We have had to rely on informal assurances from Ministers in both Houses for safeguards that are written into the law for people held in detention.

The Minister said that the Government would apply their obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998 carefully in drafting the regulations to be introduced. I took her to mean that in place of safeguards being provided in the legislation, we are being invited tonight to trust to the Government's interpretation of their obligations under the European convention on human rights, that the Government will not introduce restrictions on personal liberty that would bring them into conflict with the convention and that that is what will give legal weight to the assurances of Ministers in another place. There are still questions that the Government need to answer on appropriate safeguards for people held in such circumstances.

I shall deal briefly with how people are to be selected for this procedure. In reply to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), I thought that the Minister implied that the decision would greatly depend on the assessment made at the port of entry by members of the immigration service of the ease with which a case could be determined. Can she confirm whether the Government intend that people should be selected on a case-by-case basis or whether they plan to put applicants from particular countries through the procedure?

Mrs. Roche: To elaborate on what I said, it will depend on the initial assessment of the immigration officer. If it appears that the case requires more detailed examination, we will ensure that that happens. Clearly, the ability to make such an initial assessment is incredibly helpful at the beginning of the process.

Mr. Lidington: I am grateful for that advice.

I refer the Minister to a comment made by the Attorney-General in another place that would again benefit from elucidation here. In discussing the powers, he said:

> "In the short term, some asylum seekers who may congregate in specific areas may still be on social security benefit. We want to have this power available. We do not envisage using the power on a routine basis, but only to relieve extreme pressures on specific areas in extreme circumstances."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 2 November 1999; Vol. 606, c. 736.]

As those who will be on social security benefit will be people who will have been admitted at a port at any time up to 31 March 2000, is it right to interpret the Attorney-General's remarks as meaning that the Government intend that the powers should be used to require people currently in receipt of social security living in one part of this country to move to a particular location in another area, and that this power should therefore be seen as an adjunct to the dispersal scheme that will come into force after 31 March next year?

11.30 pm

Mr. McDonnell: There has been confusion in the debate in the House of Lords and even in this Chamber, to a certain extent, about the relationship of Oakington to the legislation. The Government need to take responsibility for that confusion. Lord Falconer said on 18 October:

> "We are examining the possibility of establishing a reception facility at which asylum seekers would reside while their claim was examined and a rapid decision taken. . . . As such residences have a wider purpose, we believe that we need the wider power that amendment No. 289 and now amendment No. 329 provides."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 October 1999; Vol. 605, c. 752.]

He confirmed that that was a power separate from the one to award bail on conditions.

However, by 2 November Lord Williams of Mostyn said:

> "I stress that the facility at Oakington is based on existing detention powers. . . . it is designed to deal with claims where it appears that a rapid decision can be made. . . . I repeat . . . that applicants will be required to stay at Oakington under existing immigration powers to detain."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 2 November 1999; Vol. 606, c. 733.]

We accept that Oakington is based on existing powers, but we should have had a statement to the House about its development. That would have avoided the confusion around the Bill and enabled us to have a thorough debate about Oakington. I am sure that, timing permitting, it would have given us the opportunity to air some of our concerns.

I have Harmondsworth detention centre in my constituency, and we all know some of the problems at Harmondsworth and Campsfield in terms of quality of life, possible abuses of human rights and physical abuse. Much good work has gone on in recent years to introduce procedures to protect the internees.

The problem with not having a debate specifically about Oakington on the basis of a statement is that we have not been able to question Ministers more thoroughly on safeguards. I would welcome the Minister's reconfirmation tonight of the safeguards that will be introduced at Oakington. For example, there should be similarity of treatment at all detention centres in terms of committees of visitors and access to legal advice—some assurances have been given on that tonight. It is vital that the voluntary organisations and others who provide legal advice be fully and adequately funded.

Mrs. Roche: I can give my hon. Friend an assurance on committees of visitors. I repeat the assurance about legal advice. People will be in the centre for very short periods so that we can process their applications. The facilities that I mentioned will be there. We are actively consulting the voluntary sector.

Mr. McDonnell: I welcome those assurances and I understand the commitment of my hon. Friend the Minister and her team to ensuring that the period of detention is short. I accept that and I appreciate the Minister's record. I know it both in local and central Government to be one of success and adherence to her commitments. However, Ministers come and go. I am sure that there is a long career in other Departments and elsewhere for her, but we need further assurances in more detailed regulations about the nature of the detention in Oakington and similar detention centres that may be developed.

We are entering a new phase of development which is neither the old detention centre nor some voluntary arrangement: it is something in between. It is an ill-defined ground. We need to define it more closely, admittedly, perhaps, in regulations. For example, a contract will be issued for the management of Oakington, most probably to a private company. We need assurances about the nature of that contract; that the Race Relations Act 1976 will be applied to the staff involved; that the staff will have defined duties; and that they will be subject to disciplinary procedures if they act against those defined duties. Again, because the new process falls between existing arrangements, we need to examine them more closely.

The provision of medical, psychiatric and educational facilities has already been raised. The right to freedom of worship and access to religious advisers is important to many detainees in the existing detention centres.

Mrs. Roche: I apologise to my hon. Friend for intervening yet again, but he raises the extremely important issue of access to religious worship. I assure him that we are actively planning to deal with that matter, and am grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to make that point.

Mr. McDonnell: I respond with equal gratitude to my hon. Friend for that assurance.

As the Oakington proposal has not been thoroughly debated in this place, and has not been reported on in detail, there is a danger—if not under the Labour Government, then under other Governments—of the development of internment camps if migration to this country increases, for whatever reason. It thus behoves the Government to issue an early—possibly in the new Session—and thorough statement on the development of Oakington; to repeat the assurances that we have been given today; and to set out some more detailed regulations that we can debate at length. We could then be assured that this one-off scheme—as it is now described, although there could be further developments if we are not careful—is under rigorous public control and accountability.

It would have been helpful if we could have debated amendments such as these at an earlier point in the Bill's progress. I regret that the debate is occurring so late in the process, because of the great scale of the powers under the measures. There is an element of confusion. The most important issue is not the potential for house arrest; I am concerned as to the potential for hostel arrest. As we have seen in Europe, asylum seekers and refugees have been required to reside in a particular hostel, and such hostels have degenerated into what are almost internment camps. They have also become targets for racists and others.

Faced with problems in a specific area, it would be easy to go down that slippery slope. Heathrow is in my constituency, and I have problems that are similar in scale to those in Dover—especially with regard to unaccompanied children. I encounter all the racist backlash. We have all had our windows broken. In the early 1980s, when we had similar problems, broken glass was put into my child's sandpit. We have all had such

[Mr. McDonnell]

experiences. However, the reaction should be to stand firm and to argue our case—it should be to punish not the innocent but the perpetrators. That is what our policies on racial and domestic violence are designed to do.

If we accept the proposal in the amendment, we could go down the slippery slope of the establishment of a system in this country in which asylum seekers are placed in hostels by law, and that would undermine their ability to integrate in the longer term. I do not believe that all the cases are bogus—the figure of two thirds has been mentioned. However, in my constituency surgery, like many hon. Members, I have dealt with a large number of asylum seekers, many of whom tell horrendous and honest stories of the suffering that they have endured. After long and tortuous processing in this country, many of them have been given the right to remain here. The measure will make such people vulnerable, if we are not careful. It will lead to a diminution of people's basic human right to decide on where they live and on the community in which they feel secure.

At the moment, we need to stand back. I accept the Minister's assurance that the power will not be used routinely. However, the problem is that although I inherently trust this Minister, we need something more than the oral assurance that we received tonight. It is critical that the regulations be drafted soon and laid before the House, so that we can define the criteria on which the powers are to be used. We must define them in such a way as to ensure that their use does not become routine, but remains exceptional. The powers have been introduced to deal with a problem, but we should look at other powers to tackle the perpetrators of the problem.

The Bill has thrown up a range of issues. Some of us have watched recent television programmes about the debates surrounding the immigration legislation of the 1960s and 1970s. To be honest, that legislation was a cover to make racism respectable. Now, if we are not careful, we risk making respectable the targeting of asylum seekers and refugees. It is appropriate to debate measures such as the one before us, but in doing so we do not confront the perpetrators of racism. As long as we couch our debate in terms of large numbers of bogus asylum seekers swamping—to use the Thatcherite word—this country, we give in to the racists.

We should be arguing the case, as I know my hon. Friend the Minister of State does, for abiding by our commitments to human rights under the European convention and other international conventions, and for treating people who come to this country fairly and with respect. I do not believe that the Bill will do that. It introduces powers that undermine the fairness of our current system and reduce the respect we pay to asylum seekers and refugees. For that reason, I wish the House could agree with the Lords amendment, which would at least place some limitations, within the time scale set out by the Government, on the exercise of those powers. I hope that, when we debate the regulations, we will define the non-routine use of those powers.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I do not want to embarrass the Minister of State, but I should like to express my full support for her position.

Although it would be a great threat to public safety, it might be a good idea to invite the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) to become Home Secretary for one week, so that we could see how he coped with a vast increase in the number of asylum seekers—individuals who, on coming here, are not treated with dignity or respect, but are dumped by some filthy London borough in seaside towns like Southend-on-Sea. If hon. Members think that I am wrong to say that, I invite them to come and see Southend. In Southend, the local council, officials and the local Member of Parliament are all concerned about promoting good race relations, but, believe me, if nothing is done about the problems, race relations will be undermined in a borough where such problems have never occurred previously.

It is reasonable to ask how many asylum seekers there are in Southend. The answer is that our excellent director of social services, a lady of great sympathy and understanding who is greatly concerned about maintaining good race relations, has not the slightest idea how many there are. We know how many cases have been directly referred to us, but we have no knowledge of the total number because other authorities, especially London authorities, have a habit of simply putting such persons in bed-and-breakfast establishments in Southend-on-Sea.

On the other hand, we do have figures for those attending local schools. I invite the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey to visit the splendid Porters Grange school in Southend-on-Sea. The school serves an area of great social deprivation, lying in a ward with 20 per cent. unemployment. When I was at the school last week, I learned that children who could not speak a word of English were constantly being dumped there. Four more arrived last week: they were gypsy refugees from the former Czechoslovakia who face great violence in their home country. The schools in my constituency that have been landed with lots of children who speak no English have to start with basics, such as "This is a pen," and then try to make progress.

Nothing is filthier than hearing the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) claim that the current crisis is all the fault of the previous Government. Those who try to blame any particular Government are kidding themselves. We have had a huge influx of political refugees, which has created problems not for the leafy London boroughs, but for the places where the asylum seekers land.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I may have to wait a week or two to become the Home Secretary, but in the meantime I am happy to take up the hon. Gentleman's invitation to visit Southend. I hope that he had understood that the crucial point is not that London boroughs or other boroughs are dumping people on Southend, but that it is for Parliament to deal with people who come to our shores. Some of us are trying to get the legislation right, so that his community, my community and all others are able to integrate and deal with people who come here, in a way that means that people who are here before them do not feel that they are being dumped on them.

11.45 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor: Quite frankly, I have not heard such rubbish in the House for a long time. I have been in this place for 35 years. I do not think that I have ever been so insulted in my life. I ask the hon. Gentleman—if thousands of people are coming in as political refugees,

what do we do? Is it not normal to say that we should try to find a way to spread them around, and not have them concentrated in particular areas, because that will not help good race relations? Apart from anything else, such concentrations are not good for schools, which are already having great difficulty in coping with a very difficult situation, if lots of children who do not speak a word of English are landed on them.

I hope that the Minister will advise me what is happening on the issue of immigration law relating to asylum seekers. I understand that the law in Britain differs from that in the other countries of the European Union, in that we have a law that a person can claim political asylum, first, if they are being persecuted by their Government and their safety is at risk; or secondly, if they are being persecuted by individuals within that country.

I understand that the law in France, Germany and other such countries is different, and that it refers only to a nation and not to the people. That has considerable implications, as we understand that, at a very recent meeting of the European nations, it was agreed that they would seek to harmonise legislation on political asylum. Will that mean that those who are persecuted as individuals will thereby lose their entitlement to political asylum? That could have a very substantial impact on people who come here from, for example, the former Czechoslovakia. They are not being persecuted by their Government, but are being subjected to appalling persecution because they are gypsies and because people there have a low regard for them.

The Minister's proposal for special accommodation is sensible. First, I wish that those who are uneasy about that proposal would ask themselves what the alternative is. The alternative is not that, as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) said, people are looking for a place where they feel safe and happy; they are simply dumped in seaside towns.

Secondly, we have to ask, "What are the consequences of the present policy for good race relations?" I would ask anyone who is in doubt to telephone Miss Jane Held, who is not a right winger—at present, the council in Southend happens to be controlled by Labour and Liberals, with a majority of one over the Conservatives. Miss Held is in no sense looking for trouble, but she rightly says that, when asylum seekers are concentrated in one area, groups of young men congregate, which, unfortunately, leads to trouble. It has led to trouble in Southend-on-Sea. Those who try to pretend that there is no problem are kidding themselves.

If we want to preserve good race relations in this country and protect asylum seekers, the most obvious thing to do, as the Minister said, is to speed up decision making. The second thing to do is to ensure that we spread the people around as far as is reasonably possible, and do not have concentrations in certain areas in seaside towns. It does not help the individuals.

I have had the pleasure of meeting quite a few asylum seekers at my weekly surgeries in Southend. Some of them are rather unusual people, some seem very pathetic and some seem very sad. Obviously, the crucial thing for them is for a decision to be reached on their case as quickly as possible, but if there is not some organisation—some control of the situation—all that will happen is that, in places such as Southend, where, happily, we have good, harmonious race relations, trouble may well start. Any move by the Government to give the impression that they are trying to speed up decision making and trying to take control of the situation will be good, not only for Southend, but for the asylum seekers.

Our liberal, pleasant and gracious asylum laws were designed in times when only a small number of people applied for asylum. Now, we are faced with thousands of applicants. If we do nothing, both those who are genuine and those who are not will continue to be concentrated in particular places. Unless something is done, we shall not help asylum seekers in any way. I do not favour having a single place, but special accommodation would be a worthwhile and positive response that would help both asylum seekers and the promotion of good race relations in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclennan: My case has already been eloquently made by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell). I disagreed only with his thinking that this obnoxious new clause should be allowed on to the statute book. I would not rely on the possibility of enlightenment ever dawning on the Government's Front-Bench team before the subordinate legislation is introduced. If Ministers will not listen to the hon. Gentleman's appeal tonight, why should we expect them to change their minds in the weeks or months ahead?

The Minister of State's refusal or failure to answer questions about what mischief she seeks to remedy—she evaded giving answers by talking repeatedly about the sensitivity of the situation—was dealt with by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) with his usual eloquent directness. He displayed, in all its ugliness, what the new clause is really about. It is a response to pressures, which ought to be resisted, of the type identified by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington, who lives in a far more explosive situation than does the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East. Such a response can be effective only if people are prepared to stand up to those who threaten communities with illegal actions.

It is unacceptable that a statute should be justified by the fear that its absence would encourage illegality. That stands logic on its head. We cannot rely on assurances by Ministers about how legislation might be used. Nor can we rely on their present intentions. Successive Home Secretaries have intended to speed up consideration of applications by refugees and asylum seekers, but those intentions have not been realised. There is no reason to believe that the Minister or her colleagues can wave a wand that will solve the problems overnight.

Mr. Gapes: I am not clear whether the right hon. Gentleman favours or opposes a dispersal policy, and should be grateful if he would clarify his position. Does he favour an attempt to take pressure off my borough and others in London, and off council areas in Kent and elsewhere? Those areas have serious housing shortages and other problems. That is a fact, and I am not making any racist or inflammatory remark, but I should be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman would clarify his position.

Mr. Maclennan: Of course I favour taking the pressure off, but it must be done by devoting the necessary resources to processing applications speedily, not by sweeping problems under the carpet with this new clause.

[Mr. Maclennan]

The Minister's case has gone by default. She has not deigned to answer a single question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) about the reasons for the new clause. She spoke about sensitivity, using the word, I think, seven times as a verbal evasion of reality. She has absolutely refused to describe the situation that the new clause is supposed to cover.

I repeat the appeal of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington: do not punish the innocent; stand firm against illegality. I thought that the hon. Lady would be particularly sensitive to that appeal as she has a record of concern about such matters. The change in her position should not change her attitude. It sounded tonight as though the hon. Lady was resiling from the kind of commitment that she has shown in the past to tackling effectively the problems of refugees.

Mrs. Roche: I hesitate to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but I think he is doing the House a disservice. I said that, as far as public order is concerned, we are seeking to protect everybody. That is clearly what one does in public order situations. The right hon. Gentleman has closed his eyes to the real situation: he is making assertions that are completely unrealistic and have nothing to do with the debate.

Mr. Maclennan: With respect, those who oppose the Government's measures should not have to justify them using their arguments. I believe it lies with the Minister to explain the mischief that she apprehends. However, she has not done that. She evaded the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, she did not reply to my intervention and she has not intervened during the debate to explain the public order concerns.

If there is a threat of public disorder, the law should be turned not against innocent refugees or asylum seekers in this country, but against those who threaten it. The hon. Lady may shake her head, but, if she cannot understand that, she should stop posing as the friend of those who seek protection under the laws of this country from oppression and tyranny elsewhere.

Mr. Gerrard: I will be brief. I had not intended to speak in this debate, but the contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) and other hon. Members have left me more confused about exactly what is proposed by the amendment and for Oakington than I was at the beginning of the evening.

There is some confusion regarding Oakington and the proposed new clause. It would help if we could have a clear statement to the House about Oakington in the near future in order to separate it from the new clause. Even the regulations covered by Lords amendment No. 329 to schedule 13 will not tell us anything about Oakington, which will be run under existing detention powers. I repeat the plea for an urgent, clear statement about Oakington and how it will function. We have received some assurances in that regard, which I welcome.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly good point. I hope that he accepts that, through our specific amendment to the Bill, the Liberal Democrats are trying to put to one side the Oakington proposal, which comes under existing legislation. We are seeking to make the case that, unless someone can show why we need different legislation for different arrangements, we should not go further down that road until we know what Oakington will deliver.

Mr. Gerrard: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I suspect that some people listening to the debate may think that the 10-day limit proposed in the hon. Gentleman's amendment would apply to Oakington, even though it would not. The issue of how long people remain in Oakington will be determined by the administration of Oakington, and that decision will be influenced by factors such as whether bail applications are accepted and so on. The way in which Oakington has been described makes me fear that it will be used for people who will be fast-tracked by short-term, quick decisions and people who come in from particular ports and particular countries. That sounds suspiciously like a new form of white list.

12 midnight

The first line of Lords amendment No. 1 says:

"The Secretary of State may provide, or arrange for the provision of, facilities for the accommodation of persons . . . temporarily admitted to the United Kingdom",

and so on. It seems to me that the powers that flow from that amendment could apply to any asylum seeker in the new support system because although their accommodation may not have been provided directly by the Secretary of State, he will have arranged for the provision of the facilities.

Lords amendment No. 329 refers to provisions requiring the person to reside in such accommodation and prohibiting them from being absent, and I find it difficult to square that with some of what we were told on Third Reading. We were told that if people had an offer of accommodation and support, but said that they wanted to live elsewhere, the Home Office would accept that, provided that they were living at a registered address, and they could then accept only the support package.

Those assurances about elements of choice within the support system are difficult to square with the possibility of much more draconian impositions on people. As I read it, Lords amendment No. 1 could apply to anyone in the support system, whether they are temporarily admitted to the UK, have come out of detention or been released on bail from detention. That worries me, and I should be grateful for clarification on that point.

In conclusion, I return to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington. It is clear to anyone who reads the *Official Report* of the debates in the Lords that there is enormous confusion about how what Ministers are saying relates to Home Office press releases. Unfortunately, the issue of Oakington arose at roughly the same time and became mixed up in the debate about the new powers. A clear statement on Oakington would be helpful because that is not a matter to which we will be able to return when we consider regulations made under Lords amendment No. 329.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): It is a pity that, as the hon. Member who represents Oakington,

it is after midnight when I am given the opportunity to say something about my constituency and the circumstances there.

In defence of Ministers, I point out that when the announcement about Oakington was made, I was under no illusions that the centre was other than a centre established under existing Immigration Act powers. That much, at least, was said. It would have been much simpler if, on 21 October when the press release was issued, the Home Office had said that the centre would be designated as a detention centre and established under existing powers. It would then have been perfectly obvious that the safeguards for Oakington that we have, quite properly, been pressing on the Minister this evening would flow from such a designation.

I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) that when one reads the House of Lords debate, it was perfectly unclear, even as late as Third Reading, what was the character of Oakington, who would be there, how it was to be designated and even how it was to be described. Even though the legal basis for the establishment of the centre at Oakington may be perfectly clear, that tells us remarkably little about what will be the regime at Oakington. That is the more pertinent question this evening. It is clear that the scale will be substantial. Ministers speak of up to 400 asylum seekers being present there for up to seven days. Indeed, I have heard references to a larger number, as I am told that the capacity is greater than that.

On the basis of present figures, one in four or a greater proportion of asylum seekers could be held at Oakington for a period. The character of the regime provided there is therefore an important consideration. We have been through some relevant matters, and the Minister has leapt swiftly to the Dispatch Box to say, for example, that legal advice will be available or that it will be possible to maintain religious worship. However, we have not dealt with these matters in detail.

It matters a great deal to those at Oakington whether the legal advice available is the same as that which would be available under other circumstances. The Minister knows perfectly well that Oakington is not in an area where there is large-scale independent legal advice for refugees and asylum seekers.

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are keen that people residing at Oakington have full access to independent legal advice, and we are having discussions with the Refugee Legal Centre about what could be established.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the Minister for that further assurance. I am sure that the Refugee Council, the Refugee Legal Centre and the Immigration Advisory Service will all be listening carefully to the debate. If legal advice is not accessible, we will quickly find out.

My argument extends more widely. The Oakington centre is to be established in an area where there is no existing infrastructure of support for a significant number of refugees. East Anglia was not identified as a cluster area for dispersal of asylum seekers when the Government made their previous announcement. It should, by extension, be assumed that none of the infrastructure of support in the local community which would normally be looked for in a dispersal area is available in Cambridgeshire.

If resources are to be made available, they must be made available additionally, whether in support for families—it is clear that families, including children will be present—or through legal advice or medical and other facilities. I shall not detain the House, but it should be put on the record that if all those pressures fall on the local community, they cannot be accommodated readily with the resources available to Cambridgeshire as a local authority in respect of social services, because of child protection issues; as a health authority, because of the rapid rate of population growth; and as a police authority, about which I have been writing to the Home Secretary in recent weeks.

Despite all that the Minister and her colleagues in another place have said, it is still unclear what sort of people are to be held at Oakington. What does that tell us about the requirement for security and support? I have dwelt for the moment on safeguards and support for those who are present, but if Oakington is designated as a detention centre, many of my constituents are aware of the experience of other detention centres, and they will feel that something that they do not understand and which raises serious physical security issues is being established in their midst.

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the press release and his understanding of what was proposed for Oakington. In the third paragraph of the press release that I issued, we made it clear that applicants will be required to reside at Oakington under existing immigration powers for initial examination of their claim. We could not be more direct and open about the situation.

Mr. Lansley: When the Minister checks the record, she will find that that is precisely what I said. In the press release, she made it clear that the centre would be established using existing Immigration Act powers. What the Minister did not say in the press release was that Oakington would be designated as a detention centre, which would have made it simpler for everyone to examine the safeguards that flow from that designation. However, I do not want to rehearse what I said earlier, which still stands.

The Minister and I will be in correspondence and, if the Minister listens to her hon. Friends, we will have another opportunity to question the form of the regime that is to be established. If it is to start in the new year, and a contract is to be let to resolve all the practical issues between now and then, the Home Office and the Minister must have a detailed understanding of what is intended at Oakington.

The issue for my constituents is who will be there. They may well be families and thus represent no significant physical security problems. On the other hand, initially it may consist of largely single males, giving rise to a physical security issue. It is all very well for the Minister to say that the regime will be relaxed, implying that there will be no additional security, and that those present will be able to obtain approval to visit shops or medical services, but that simply raises the question in the local community of why these people are being detained rather than being given temporary approval and dispersed elsewhere. If they are being detained there is presumably some risk of their absconding or of physical security problems, and a string of consequences flows from that.

[Mr. Lansley]

The Minister says that there will be no additional security and no direct problems for the local community, and we are talking of a village rather than a city context. If that is true, we must be clear about the character of the persons there and why they need detention, with all that that implies in terms of maintaining security, but do not require security to the extent that the local community needs to be concerned about the relaxed nature of the regime.

We shall come to all these issues, but at the heart of the matter is a failure on the part of the Home Office to understand that it is not sufficient to have announced such a facility and its legal base, without amplifying on the character of the regime and how it fits with those who will be there.

I have no fundamental objection to the establishment of the facility, and the Minister knows that I have made that clear locally. We are in a difficult situation. The problem is substantially of the Government's making, with a 60 per cent. year-on-year increase in asylum applications, but it is a problem that we must solve. If a centre at Oakington can assist in the fast assessment of applications—it is generally agreed that speedy assessment is necessary—well and good, but I am also sure that we need to be clear about the character of the regime to be applied there, so that the safeguards that should be applied to the asylum seekers themselves exist, and the safeguards for the local community that have been hinted at in letters to me and in meetings with the local community are delivered, so that the process does not become a burden or a source of concern to my constituents.

Mr. Corbyn: When the Minister opened the debate, she said that one reason for having detention centres—Oakington came to mind—was the great financial burden imposed on local authorities and the demands on their social services departments. What worries me about that is that, if we are to say that it is too expensive for local authorities to undertake the work necessary to support asylum-seeking families—particularly families—and they are put in the equivalent of a detention centre, either the cost will be transferred to a detention centre, if it is properly run, or the asylum-seeking families will be offered much less in the way of local authority and social services support than they would get if they were placed in the community. I find both those suggestions unacceptable.

12.15 am

My borough, like many inner-London boroughs, contains a large number of asylum seekers. The local authority staff work extremely hard in supporting them in the best way that they can, but the introduction of the voucher system for food and the like has done enormous damage to relationships in the area. Large numbers of asylum seekers scout round the place looking for the appropriate supermarket in which to spend the vouchers. They cannot cash them on the market or anywhere else, so they spend more to get less although they have an inadequate income. They also have the inadequate diet that goes with it. We should be realistic: we are saying that asylum seekers apparently deserve less than 75 per cent. of what the poorest in this country receive in income support. That is no way to treat people who have come here, within the terms of the 1951 Geneva convention, seeking a place of safety.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will explain what exactly is happening with the development of detention centres and the powers of detention that go with that. I am disturbed by all that has been said about Oakington being set up. Indeed, under the previous Government I initiated Adjournment debates on Campsfield detention centre, its administration and all the problems that have gone with it. If Oakington is to be anything like Campsfield, it will have high security, massive gates and lots of guards. Basically, a prison will be established there. Unless she can assure me that Oakington will be very different—more like the supportive centres that some European countries have—I shall have to conclude that it is part of a process of assigning asylum seekers to particular detention centres around the country from which their applications will be fast-tracked. I suggest that the very fact that applications will be fast-tracked and applicants sent to such places will be prejudicial to a fair hearing of their cases.

We have to realise that the cause of people seeking asylum is events in other countries, some of which are of our own making. It is all very well for us to complain about the number of asylum seekers coming from Turkey, but at the same time we are selling arms to the Turkish Government, who are doing so much damage to so many Kurdish people in that part of the world. There is a foreign policy connection.

My hon. Friend the Minister ought to be ensuring that the local authorities, which are doing their best, are given sufficient support and money and are, above all, reimbursed quickly when they undertake such expenditure. There should be no further development of any detention centres without specific proposals coming before the House following proper consultation. Such centres should not be introduced as holding centres when, in reality, they are detention centres that are, as I understand it, very much like Campsfield, Haslar and the others, which have a poor reputation.

Mr. Allan: I shall summarise our views on our amendment, but first I should dispose of the Oakington issue. We did not intend to have the major debate on it, but our discussion has been useful. Although occasionally robust, in many ways the debate has shown why the guillotine motion was flawed: I do not feel that any time has been wasted, but we are discussing only the second group of amendments and there is plenty more to be said on other issues. However, I am speaking with a heavy heart because I am taking up time that I would like to use to debate other issues. I hope that the Minister will take on board comments made from both sides of the House about the need for a further statement on Oakington and more time to discuss the issue. There is agreement on that and I hope that she does not feel unable to make such a concession.

On our amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 1, I shall be fairly blunt: I believe that this is knee-jerk legislation which has been introduced purely as a result of the disturbances in Kent over the summer and the coincidence that they took place when the Bill could still be amended. Someone said, "Cor lumme, guvnor, we've got a problem down in Kent. We've got to do something

about it. Let's get some legislation on the statute book." In many ways, the Bill follows the dangerous dogs principle: something high profile has happened and it has made the newspapers, so we have to pass legislation. That exercises me and my hon. Friends because it is a key issue: in a free Parliament, people who want to live in a liberal society should spend as much time defending the citizen from the state as giving the state new powers to impose on the citizen.

In this case, the citizens are those who do not have British citizenship as yet, although some will eventually achieve it. We do not seek to make a distinction between those who have come from abroad and those who happen to be British citizens in terms of the civil right to be free from detention and from having one's liberty restricted. The proposed provision represents a fairly unfettered power to restrict the right to free movement and access.

The Minister has talked about the proposed power as a possible form of curfew, yet if we do not amend the Bill, the law will prohibit freedom of movement subject to any conditions imposed in the relevant regulations. The Bill does not stipulate day or night, or specify anything more than giving the Secretary of State a power to impose restrictions on people's movements.

To put it bluntly, the provisions effectively surrender to the British National party and those who have taken to the streets and sought to attack asylum seekers. Blame does not always lie 100 per cent. in one direction, although that seems the clear implication of the proposed legislation. It is saying that there will be trouble if a certain group of asylum seekers in a particular district go out at night, so, without confronting the cause of that trouble, a power will be introduced to keep such people inside. That is a very dangerous route to go down.

There are already proportionate provisions under the Immigration Act 1971 for detention where there is a problem. The Minister said that the Government's legal advice is that the powers are supposed to be used only in response to absconding. That is right; the state should not take to itself powers to detain, imprison or hold people under house arrest unless to do so is a proportionate response to some offence or mischief.

If applicants are criminal, it is right under certain circumstances to lock them up. It may be right to detain people who abscond from the immigration service, so long as they have the right to challenge the decision and prove why they would not abscond. However, it cannot be correct to provide an arbitrary power under which the Secretary of State can decide to keep people under house arrest because he judges that, otherwise, public order offences may be committed and that those people should be protected from themselves. He is giving in to those who might be seeking to cause harm and contribute to the public order offence.

So many questions are left open. How will the power be enforced? What will be the penalties for breaching it? What if someone is in genuine fear of torture or death in their home country and does not conform to the Secretary of State's curfew? Would the Secretary of State ship such people home to face torture and death? How will legitimate legal challenges be dealt with?

The powers for dealing with somebody in a family are not clear either. Lord Williams expressed some very different views in another place. In one instance, he described how the new powers could be used to develop reception facilities in which people would reside. Therefore, the powers are about putting families and individuals into a new form of detention centre. So, we have the proper detention centre, the strange hybrid beast of the Oakington detention centre and the new-power detention centres. We are adding again and again to the powers of the Secretary of State to deprive people of their liberty, applying different conditions and tests to each.

What power will an individual have to challenge such decisions? The Government are giving with one hand and taking back with the other. To the Government's credit, on detention powers under the 1971 Act they have given us a presumption in favour of bail, with standardised hearings after seven days, for which we have called. However, they have introduced another power under which the maximum time limit is not specified and there is no ability for individuals to challenge the restriction of liberty. Such knee-jerk provision takes us two steps back, just when we thought that it was one of the few elements on which we on the Liberal Democrat Benches thought we had taken one step forward.

Mr. Clappison: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Does he agree that all that we have heard makes nonsense and a mockery of the Home Secretary's proud boast about the Special Standing Committee procedure? Such matters should definitely have been considered at its sittings.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman makes a very fair point. Groups that work with refugees and others who are subject to immigration control have passed many pieces of information to me expressing their extreme concern, which would have been forceful evidence in the Special Standing Committee.

This is a sensitive issue, but sensitivity does not mean lack of scrutiny. The reverse is true, precisely because it is sensitive, and because we know that some of the forces not of conservatism but of fascism have been involved in the incidents that have forced the Government to bring the measure forward. Those forces have been there in Dover and other parts of Kent, peddling their filth and their muck around the streets. We know that they are involved—and that means that we should talk about the issue for more time, not less. We should not rush through a Lords amendment that, when we think about the history of where it has come from, we see is clearly a reaction to the forces of fascism.

We must be careful about the process of tagging bits on to Bills—or why not leave Bills open all the year round so that we can simply tag extra bits of legislation on to them at various stages? I have no doubt that the provision would not have emerged if the Bill had not still been open to amendment over the recess.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that he causes grave offence in implying, by associating the word "fascism" with it, that the Bill is a knee-jerk reaction to what happened in the summer? Does he accept that what has been happening in many constituencies for many years is intolerable, and that it is in no one's interests that it be allowed to continue? Does he not at least accept that there is an

[Mr. Stephen Pound]

element of good will and positive thinking on the part of the Government, and an attempt to resolve the situation before it degenerates even further?

Mr. Allan: I have been careful not to say that the Bill as a whole is related to the wider issue and the wider build-up of problems. I say simply that the specific measure before us, which the Minister has already said was introduced in response to public order incidents involving fascists over the summer—*[Interruption.]* She made the point herself that it was a response—

Mrs. Roche: No.

Mr. Allan: It was a response to public order events in Kent, and my reading of the newspapers—

Mrs. Roche: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and he too must be careful and report accurately what I said. I said that the power was new and would not be used routinely, but would be subject to scrutiny. I made it clear that public order would be one of the considerations affecting its use, but not the only one. The hon. Gentleman forgets himself.

Mr. Allan: I take that elucidation on board, but the incidents in Kent of which we are all aware constituted one of the factors behind the Lords amendment. I still bluntly maintain that the provision was introduced purely because of the coincidence of the Bill's remaining open when the incidents occurred, and that that is not the appropriate way in which to respond to such events.

I return to the fundamental principle that the state should restrict the liberty of the individual, whether that individual be a citizen or not, only in extreme circumstances and when it has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt, subject to proper scrutiny, why it should take those powers.

If the Government do not accept our amendment—or even if they do, but still press ahead with the powers that they are taking—we shall move into a world in which children under 10, and foreigners subject to immigration control, can be subject to such things as curfews and home detention orders without proper scrutiny, and without having committed any criminal offence. I urge the House to support our amendment to restrict the powers, and to be very careful about placing such powers on the statute book.

Mr. Dawson: I am extremely perturbed by Lords amendment No. 1, and the prospect of

"the provision of, facilities for the accommodation of persons".

That is partly because the language seems so benign, and it has been difficult to find out what the facilities might be and what they might mean.

It is a shame that at the end of our dealings with a complex and challenging Bill, such a far-reaching proposal has been made. I simply do not understand the need for such accommodation. I do not understand the institutional rules that will need to surround such provision, nor its place within a human rights agenda.

The most disturbing aspect is the fact that we shall expect children, either as part of families or unaccompanied, to be accommodated in such facilities.

Mrs. Roche: There is no suggestion whatever that we would seek to place unaccompanied children at Oakington.

12.30 am

Mr. Dawson: I am grateful for that clarification. However, children will still be held at such institutions as part of families. To accommodate children in circumstances that will be, at the very least, restricted seems to me to be wrong. It goes against our concept of childhood and the ability of parents to care properly for their children. It will also deny parents access to the facilities that their children need. Those children could end up living among undesirable people and be unable to get away. That is inappropriate.

We have heard of the need for proper discussion of the regulations surrounding the proposals at an early stage, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to make arrangements that stop such facilities being used for children in any circumstances. The facilities cannot accord with the United Nations convention on the rights of the child or with an agenda that stresses care for children and family friendly policies. I hope that the facilities will not be used for children in any circumstances.

Mrs. Roche: I am glad that we have had this debate. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised many important issues and I have listened carefully to the requests for as much information as possible about Oakington. I shall reflect on how we can make that available. We are already actively consulting the voluntary organisations and have been open with them about access.

I must point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) that it would be wrong to split up families, and that is why we are providing the accommodation at Oakington. I must also say to the Liberal Democrat Members who have spoken that I believe that they will have cause to repent the tone of their remarks, when they have time to reflect on them tomorrow in the cold light of day. It is a great shame that they made their comments in such a way. In contrast, both Labour and Conservative Members made several practical points.

The most humanitarian approach is to speed up applications so that we can deal swiftly with those cases that are unfounded and can grant status to those whose cases are genuine as quickly as possible. Indeed, the Government have shown their commitment to that approach by publishing a consultation document on refugee integration. *[Interruption.]* Liberal Democrat Members are talking among themselves, but they never mentioned the positive steps that the Government are taking. I hope that the House will agree to the Lords amendment.

Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment: (a), in line 8, at end add—

'(2) No person shall be accommodated by the Secretary of State under subsection (1) for a period exceeding 10 days.'—*[Mr. Simon Hughes.]*

Question put, That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 39, Noes 296.

Division No. 317] **[12.34 am**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Robert Smith and
Mr. David Heath.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert

Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being more than five hours after commencement of proceedings on the supplemental allocation of time order, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Questions necessary for the disposal of proceedings to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendment No. 1 agreed to [Special Entry].

Lords amendment No. 139 and amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 135: Mr. Mike Hall, Mr. Tom Levitt, Mr. David Lidington, Mrs. Barbara Roche and Mr. Keith Simpson; Mrs. Barbara Roche to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to Lords amendment No. 135 reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance Amendment (New Deal) Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 14th July, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (New Deal Pilot) Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 21st October, be approved.

That the draft Jobseeker's Allowance (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 21st October, be approved.

VALUE ADDED TAX

That the Value Added Tax (Input Tax) (Amendment) Order 1999 (S.I., 1999, No. 2930), dated 26th October 1999, a copy of which was laid before this House on 27th October, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Executive and Legislature

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

12.48 am

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The Adjournment debate tonight is about the role of the House of Commons. If it is any relief to the Minister who is to reply, I am not really expecting any sort of response. If he listens, I shall be very content because what I want to talk about deals with the House itself.

My qualifications for opening this debate are that I was elected 49 years ago this month and have fought 17, and won 16, contested elections, which the Library tells me is a record equalled only by Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Churchill. The Library also told me that 431,622 people had voted for me, and it is on their behalf that I want to speak tonight. Having sat in 14 Parliaments under 11 Prime Ministers, with eight Speakers, I feel qualified to comment on the work of the House.

I should like to make clear what the debate is not about. It is not about relations between the Government and the Opposition. It is not about relations between Front Benchers and Back Benchers—what one might call the Privy Councillors and the rest. It is not a debate between Conservative and Labour. It is not a debate between left and right. In the long history of Parliament, all those are relatively new issues. The debate is about the oldest issue of all—the relationship between the Government and the governed. The House of Commons speaks for the governed. The debate is about the role of the House of Commons as a legislative assembly and about relations between the Commons and the Government of the day.

I hope that the House will forgive me if I look back for a moment at our history. We say that we are and always have been a parliamentary democracy, but I am afraid that it is not quite as simple as that. When I take visitors round the House, I point out that all the statues here are of people totally opposed to parliamentary democracy and in particular to votes for women. The truth is that there has been a long struggle from the very beginning of time for the common people to be represented in such a way as to have some capacity to influence the Government of the day.

Britain has always had a Government. Julius Caesar was a Government. He introduced a single currency, but I will not go into that. William the Conqueror, in Westminster abbey on Christmas day, in his coronation speech which I know almost by heart, pledged to govern the country himself. There was no question of popular consent. Then there was Charles I, and so on. But the universal adult franchise has been developed only in my own lifetime. I was born in 1925. Women were not trusted with the vote then until they were 30. Men were so arrogant that they thought that women were not really up to it until they had reached a certain maturity of years. The abolition of the secondary vote—the business vote—and the university vote took place only in 1948, about 18 months before I arrived here. So we are discussing how the development of the franchise impacts or should impact on the Government of the day.

The nation votes for a Government. That is obvious. When people vote at a general election they are concerned not just with their own representative. To be a Minister is a very hard job. I did it for 11 years, so I know that side of the story as well. The powers of a Minister and particularly of the Prime Minister are immense. In most cases, they derive not from the House but from the Crown. I want to come in a minute to the difference between Executive powers and the powers of the Government to legislate. Ever since 1688, when we had the glorious revolution, the powers of the Crown have been restored. When the Prime Minister appoints a bishop, he uses the powers of the Crown. When he appoints a judge, he uses the powers of the Crown. When he appoints a Minister, he uses the powers of the Crown. When he appoints a peer, he uses the powers of the Crown. When he appoints a commissioner, he uses the powers of the Crown. When he appoints the chairman of a royal commission or the BBC, he uses the powers of the Crown. For none of those powers is there any accountability to the House of Commons.

I once got into some difficulties for advocating the appointment of 1,000 peers to deal with the House of Lords. The Prime Minister is showing some move in that direction himself, having appointed 150 peers in the past two and a half years, and having offered peerages to members of the royal family, which is an innovation that I am trying to sort out in terms of our history. The powers of the Crown are the powers of the Government, and they have not much altered over the centuries. They include patronage and the power to go to war or to make peace. We had no vote on the war against Yugoslavia.

Of course, all the laws in Europe are made by the royal prerogative of treaty making. I was on the Council of Ministers for four years. Every time that I agreed to something, I was using the royal prerogative of treaty making. Indeed, since we joined the European Community as it was, the power to make laws by prerogative has returned for the first time since 1649—with a significance that I will not go into in any greater detail. The parliament in Europe is not the European Parliament but the Council of Ministers, which makes the laws and meets in secret—the only Parliament that does so. The Government control the agenda of our Parliament and the parliamentary timetable. Although I shall not go into the matter, it is well known that, wearing their party hats, Prime Ministers and the party machine have much influence over the conduct of Members in all parties.

If we move away from the election of a Government to the election of a Member of Parliament, constituencies vote for a representative. The electors want to be represented. Any Member who deals with correspondence—as I am sure we all do—will know that people write to us because we represent them. If people write to us from another constituency, we suggest that they get in touch with their own MP. The idea of representative government is quite different from the idea of government from the top.

When we arrive in this place, we elect a Speaker. Long may that be the case. I do not want that to be interfered with by an extension of patronage. We are here to scrutinise and challenge the Executive; we can table parliamentary questions and motions, hold debates and serve on Select Committees. We can accept, amend or reject Government legislation.

My next point is so obvious that it might shock people. Governments do not make laws. Members of Parliament make laws. I have heard Members say, "The Government have decided to do this or that—the Government have

[Mr. Tony Benn]

decided to introduce means tests for disability benefits." They do not; we do. When one of our constituents asks, "Why did the Government do that?", it is no good our saying that the Government did it—we did it. We are legislators. The function of the House as a legislative body has been obscured, to a large extent, by the requirements of party loyalty and by the practice of the House falling into line with the parliamentary majority of the day. However, those are our duties. They are duties that we must discharge. That is the meaning of a parliamentary system of government.

Of course, during the time I have been a Member, great changes have occurred—at an accelerating rate over recent years—that have altered the focus of power. There is a growing centralisation of power in all parties. I said that I would not say anything that was politically controversial, but the House will agree that the tendency to the centralisation of power did not appear recently, although Mrs. Thatcher, when she was Prime Minister, was known to be a strong central leader. Earlier Prime Ministers shared that characteristic. However, we must note that centralisation of power.

Another phenomenon that we need to examine constitutionally is the tendency for an informal coalition to bypass the electors. I shall not go into great detail on the question of Liberal Democrat Members being on a consultative Cabinet committee, but people did not vote for that in the general election. They voted for one party, which received a majority of the votes, and for another party, which received fewer votes, and the Government of the day are now bringing in the party which received the smallest number of votes. That creates the impression in the public mind—not so wrongly—of a huddling together at the centre. That factor is changing the nature of the House. When we hold debates, I have no idea, as a Back Bencher, what announcement made by Ministers has already been agreed with the Liberal party. No report is made to us on such matters—and no report is made by the Liberal party. I do not criticise that—indeed, as I hope to show, I am not criticising anything—I am trying to examine clinically what is happening to our system.

There is the impact of technology and globalisation. Globalisation is not entirely new; the old empires were global in character—when I was born, I think that the British empire covered 20 per cent. of the world's population. That was a form of globalisation. Now, of course, the free movement of capital creates enormous power. International organisations now have greater power—the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation or, to a lesser extent, the United Nations itself. Those powers have taken over from this House and, as we shall discover increasingly, if the House were to take action, or to try to take action, that protected our citizens in a way that ran counter to an agreement reached, under royal prerogative, by the Government with the WTO, we should find that what we were doing was illegal.

Of course, Europe has had a profound effect, as has devolution, with the result that the boundaries will have to be examined. In addition, there is now a far bigger role for the media. As I have always explained to people, Parliament is merely a "parlement"—we are an elected talking shop, but the real talking shop has long since moved elsewhere.

I want to be clinical so as to avoid being controversial, but I think that, without any announcement of any change being made, this country is moving from a parliamentary to a presidential system. It appears to me as an observer that, increasingly, all effective power comes from No. 10 Downing street. I understand that the current Prime Minister has twice as many advisers as his predecessor, although I do not know how many that is—20, 30, 40, 50 or 60. That is not a new development—I had two advisers when I was Secretary of State for Industry and for Energy—but it is new in the sense that it is now becoming apparent to many people, certainly to me, that the real cabinet is now in No. 10 Downing street and that policy announcements made have been discussed within that cabinet. However, that cabinet has not been elected, nor have its members been through the rigorous selection process applied to the civil service. It is far more like the American system.

That has clearly altered the character of the real Cabinet. My diary from January 1968 tells me that I had eight Cabinet meetings in a month, most or many of which lasted morning and afternoon. I understand that the Cabinet now meets for between 20 and 40 minutes. I have not probed in an improper way, but I can only conclude that the Cabinet is no longer the centre of real decision making. That has changed the relationship between the Government and Parliament, because Cabinet members sit on the Treasury Bench and answer questions. They might be less able to do so now that relations between Ministers and the Prime Minister are conducted on a one-to-one basis. I am told that no Cabinet papers have been presented by individual Cabinet Ministers since the election. When I was a Minister, I presented many, as did other Ministers, but that process has passed away without comment.

It is often said that the House of Commons is being bypassed. It is known that most statements made at 3.30 pm have been fully aired on the "Today" programme, and that Members of Parliament are secondary recipients of the information. All Governments have done that, but I do not recall its being done in quite that way in the old days.

The Prime Minister's patronage extends to the House of Lords; Select Committees are to be reviewed by the Government—the Executive attempting to control in some way the Committees that we set up; and there are rumours that the Speaker might be replaced. There are no effective checks and balances in our new presidential system comparable to those in the United States. As we know from recent history, an American President has to think about the House of Representatives, the Senate and the Supreme Court, but the president of this country does not have to think about any of those things.

Those are facts—although I hold strong views, I make no comment. Every Prime Minister can do what he likes, and the current one certainly does. My concern is the quite different question of how the House of Commons should respond to the situation I have tried to describe clinically. People say that our power has slipped away with the merging of our sovereignty, but the problem in politics is always how to respond to a situation over which one has no control. Very few people control their own situation—even the Americans could be destroyed by a nuclear weapon launched by China or Russia. The question is, how do we respond to that?

I shall set out what I take to be the obligations of Members of the House of Commons. We have obligations to our political parties, both nationally and locally. With the possible exception of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), none of us would be here were it not for the fact that we stood as party candidates. I am well aware that I would never have become a Member of Parliament or a Minister had I not been a member of the Labour party.

It is therefore right and proper that we recognise that we are carried into the House by a party at an election. I joined the Labour party on my birthday in 1942 and I intend to die in it—but not quite yet. We are all committed to the manifesto that brought us here. It seems quite reasonable that, if the party promises something, we, as individual Members, have an obligation to support it.

We are also committed to the electors that we represent, who choose us. They employ us, they can dismiss us and we must speak for them. I have learned far more from letters from constituents, and from my surgeries—500 or more people come to them every year—than from listening to debates in the House. I say that without discourtesy, because they bring the real experiences of life to me.

We are also responsible to our consciences and convictions, because the only image that matters is the image in the mirror when one shaves in the morning. No other image matters; we have to live with ourselves.

However, we—I am speaking of whoever happens to be a Government Back Bencher—are not required to take orders from the Government when a policy has not been in the manifesto, has not been put before us and has not been the subject of consultation. This very day we have had examples of that.

On welfare reform, I did not vote against the Government; I voted for disabled people. I very much resent the press talking about a rebellion. There was no rebellion. There were Members of Parliament voting according to their convictions, in the interests of their constituents. Some may disagree, as people did, but those who voted for the Government were not actually voting for the Government; they were voting for the changes in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill. I greatly resent the current personalisation of media coverage—the references to the "awkward squad", the "mavericks", the "rebels". This place is elected to give a judgment on the measures or motions brought before it, whether by Government or Opposition.

This evening we also debated immigration issues. Europe divides us. Why should the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) follow the line of his leader if the leader is changing the line on Europe? He is under no obligation to do so. Our duty is to speak and vote as we believe to be right, within the framework of loyalty that I have described to our party, to our constituents and to our conscience.

We must defend our Speaker from any attempt to remove her. I say that because, recently, a second rumour appeared that Ministers wanted to remove our Speaker.

We must control the Select Committees. Select Committee members should not be appointed by the Whips; we should elect them in the House by secret ballot. Select Committees should elect their own Chairs and not allow the Prime Minister of the day to change them. Select Committees should be given power to enforce their theoretical powers to call for persons, papers and records. Professor John Griffiths, a retired professor of public law, has sent me a most interesting memorandum in which he says that a Select Committee should be able to punish people who do not answer questions, subject to the House reversing that punishment. I also believe that there should be more free votes.

With the help of Members across the Floor, I have tabled an early-day motion. The preamble rehearses much of what I have said, but I simply read the operative passage:

"That this House . . . therefore invites all . . . Members, while honouring their personal and political obligations and loyalty to their own party and the manifesto on which they were elected, to speak and vote more freely in the House on the proposals put before them, and by doing so to re-assert their historic role as elected representatives, their right and duty to express their own deeply-held convictions and their responsibility for maintaining the role of this House as a democratic legislature holding all governments to account, having been elected by the people for that purpose.

I believe that that is the right responsibility for all of us, whichever party we belong to.

These are very moderate and reasonable proposals, but the issue raised by this discussion is enormous—the future of democracy. It is certainly true that the public, or many members of the public, feel unrepresented. That may even be true of some people in the House and, for all I know, of some people in the Government. There is cynicism—it is not a new problem—because people feel that after one has got over the election, the Government of the day do what they want.

I believe that Members of Parliament must reassert their role as Members of the House of Commons, and that the Government must accept it.

I am not asking the Government's permission to make my speech, or even asking them to respond. Every Government must learn that their majority and their power depend on the consent of the House. No one who has worked as hard as I have to get the Government into power would wish to withdraw that consent. I campaigned for Labour in 1935, and I shall campaign for Labour all my life. However, if we could approach the role of the House in the way that I have described, both Parliament and the credibility of the parties would be strengthened.

I hope that this will not be the last speech that I shall make in the House of Commons, but the House will understand that I should not be sorry if it was remembered. It has expressed my deep convictions and my determination that the new tendency towards centralisation should not obliterate the very thing of which we boast most proudly.

1.10 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Graham Stringer): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) on securing this debate. As ever, his speech was extremely interesting and erudite. The attendance in the Chamber at this time of night shows how much interest there is in his views. I should also like to place on the record my personal thanks to him for the kindnesses that he has shown me in my years in the Labour party, particularly during the 1980s. He has always been willing to discuss, argue and be supportive.

Having said that, I have listened carefully to his arguments, and I believe that he built them completely on fresh air. It was not becoming of him to repeat rumours.

[Mr. Graham Stringer]

If there is evidence of a Government threat to the House's right to choose the Speaker, my right hon. Friend should bring it to us. That would be an outrage. If there is no evidence, my right hon. Friend does not help our debate by repeating rumours.

On the day before the majority of hereditary peers lose their right to vote, at a time when the Government have decentralised power to a Parliament in Scotland and an Assembly in Wales, and at a time when the Government intend to decentralise power to a new authority in London, it seems strange to accuse that Government of centralising power. All the evidence goes against that argument. The Government have given power away and increased the level of democracy.

My right hon. Friend's next accusation was that the Government have adopted a presidential style. However, his supporting argument was that the Government have advisers. I am glad that there are twice as many advisers in Parliament as there used to be.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): They are not in Parliament.

Mr. Stringer: I beg the House's pardon, and apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I meant to say in No. 10 Downing street.

When my right hon. Friend was a Minister, he had advisers. It is good to take as much advice as possible from as many people as one can. It is no denial of democracy to have people from different positions giving information. It is no evidence of presidential style to count, as though in a classroom, attendances at Cabinet meetings.

The Government gain their authority from the House. If they could not secure a majority in the House, the Government would not continue. That is the essential point about parliamentary democracy in the Commons. The record shows that the number of questions that the Prime Minister has answered in the House and the number of statements that he has made since the general election compare favourably with the figures from the same period before that election.

I should move on to my right hon. Friend's solution to the so-called problem of centralisation, although I simply do not believe that the problem exists. The solution is to have more free votes. Every Member of Parliament is free to pass through whatever Lobby he or she likes when a vote is held. That is not the basis on which the parties— *[Interruption.]* I hope that, if that comment is quoted, it is quoted in context. Hon. Members have the right to pass through whatever Lobby they wish. Of course, hon. Members have party loyalties and they may choose to support or oppose the Government. If all hon. Members decided to vote this way and that in this place, it would be not a parliamentary democracy but chaos.

I do not believe that any sensible person, including my right hon. Friend, thinks that a Government could work in a completely unwhipped system. In such circumstances, party manifestos would have to be 2 ft thick—and I remind my right hon. Friend that the Labour party did least well at the polls with its longest manifesto in 1983. Labour has done better when we have focused on simple policies.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): No principles.

Mr. Stringer: No; we have principled policies that we can communicate directly to the electorate.

It is absurd to suggest that there should be free votes in this place and that Whips should not be involved in debates. My right hon. Friend was heard tonight to say, "Where's our Whip?" as he voted against the Government.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This has been a very interesting debate, promoted in a serious vein by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), to which the Minister is making an absorbing response. However, I seek your guidance. I take exception to a Government Whip suggesting that I was being somehow improper in exchanging with the Deputy Chief Whip—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must take his seat when I am on my feet. This is a half-hour debate and time is extremely precious. It is not a general debate.

Mr. Howarth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point of order.

Mr. Howarth: I was threatened.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point of order and I do not intend to take any more.

Mr. Stringer: My simple point is that when my right hon. Friend said, "Where's our Whip?", did the voters of Chesterfield and the local branch of the Labour party know that he was associating with a Whip from no known political party?

The House is being modernised, and democracy in this place is increasing. Select Committees are not toothless watchdogs. One has only to read reports from Select Committees comprising a majority of Labour Members to know that they are tough. There is now more pre-legislative scrutiny—in fact, it is often occurring for the first time. Unfortunately, my right hon. Friend is losing the argument. He holds a perfectly respectable position in the broad spectrum: he advances essentially republican arguments. My right hon. Friend is entitled—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eighteen minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 November 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Coal Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Madam Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), it has been indicated to me that many Members wish to participate in this debate. I would like brief speeches so that we can have wide participation.

9.33 am

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am grateful for having secured this debate on the coal industry because it is at a very important juncture. It is once again at the crossroads. I am pleased to be debating it with the Minister, as I know that she has empathy with the industry and mining communities because she represents one and understands the issues. I hope that we can encourage that empathy to translate into positive action to support the coal mining industry.

Last week, there was an announcement by RJB, the largest mining company in England, that Ellington colliery, the last in the north-east, would be closed in February 2000 with the loss of 400 quality jobs. There is a shadow across the whole of the English coalfield because some 5 million tonnes are already on stock and imports are penetrating some of the markets that United Kingdom coal previously had. I hope that this debate will play some small part in trying to find a way forward that will retain what remains of the industry within a secure, diverse and sustainable energy framework.

Government policy was contained in the October 1998 White Paper on energy, which was supposed to pave the way for a level playing field that would help the coal industry. It is fair to say that one year on, it is clear that that policy needs reviving if we are to save the coal industry. Collieries are closing, employment in deep mines is falling and the future of the entire English coalfield is threatened. However, it is not only the English coalfield that is affected, as we shall see.

Only 18 of British Coal's former deep mines are operating. There is one colliery in Scotland—the Longannet complex—two in Wales and 15 in England, soon to be cut to 14. We are fast approaching the point of losing the industry's critical mass. It is not only the English coalfield that is suffering; the Welsh and Scottish coalfields suffer from the same problems.

Since this debate was announced, I have received several letters. The chairman of Tower colliery, Tyrone O'Sullivan, says that it pays £5.4 million per annum to the Exchequer and has kept 400 people in quality jobs, thus reducing the cost of state benefits. He says:

"The UK Government needs to decide where the UK stands on Energy needs. The UK Coal Industry is the most efficient by far in Europe.

The problems we face within Anthracite is the Polish and Chinese. This coal is dumped in the UK. Also subsidies within Europe, Germany, Spain, Poland. We've stopped German coal into UK but it is within Europe affecting our exports to France, Germany and Belgium.

Coal prices are at a 20 year low, this is not sustainable but if UK pits close now . . . we will have no industry to respond in the future."

He then makes a telling point:

"Tower Colliery has constantly invested into the future with heavy financial developments of the mine and infrastructure and would like to develop another part of the mine which would produce coal directly for Aberthaw Power Station. But this development is costly and due to present uncertainties we are unable to commit ourselves. This would result in further employment at Tower if this was able to commence."

Tower feels that the uncertainties have been made worse by the Baglan Bay gas-fired power station, which will threaten the market at Aberthaw.

It is not only jobs in mining that are threatened. For example, I received a letter on Monday from the Association of British Mining Equipment Companies expressing grave concern about developments in the UK coal industry. Those companies export about £300 million of mining machinery and have been selling £200 million of equipment into the English coalfield, although that has declined recently. Every pit that closes reduces orders and threatens manufacturing jobs.

I refer the Minister to what Philip Deakin, the association's director general has to say. His letter states:

"It is apparent, and has always been understood, that should the UK mining industry cease to be a legitimate and equal fuel supplier to UK energy generators, then the effect on this manufacturing sector will be catastrophic. The loss of up to 8,000 ABMEC member company engineering jobs and over 50 companies to the UK economy will inevitably follow. This in addition to 15,000 direct employees within the mining industry.

Redundancies have and are taking place. Company turnovers have been severely reduced and profit margins slashed. Without the trading foundation of a UK coal mining industry, our drive for export sales, currently in excess of £300 million annually cannot be sustained and will inevitably leave this association's member companies with only one or two options—to cease trading or move abroad."

That is not an idle threat: if the coal industry were to decline further, members of ABMEC tell me that they would have to consider relocating in countries such as Australia and America, where there is still a deep coal mining industry. Therefore, the threat extends far wider then the core coal mining industry.

When we examine the British coal mining industry, we find that the industry's development and the cost reductions it has achieved suggest that, with a little aid, it is quite capable in the short term of reaching a point where it can stand on its own two feet. In 1994, imports into the UK cost between £1.20 and £1.30 per gigajoule, whereas UK production costs were between £1.40 to £1.50 per gigajoule. The UK industry has been able to reduce its costs and dramatically decrease the gap: now, it has got its price down and is signing contracts at £1.15 per gigajoule. However, import prices have also fallen dramatically: they now come in at between 70p and 75p per gigajoule.

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

How are we to react? Costs in the UK industry are falling and there are indications of further opportunities that might prove beneficial. In such circumstances, it is fair to ask the Minister to consider seriously action to assist the industry, perhaps formulated through regional selective assistance.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on choosing to debate this subject. On the question of aid, he will recall that those of us who voted against the pit closure programme were deeply concerned about the fact that Germany's industry receives a multi-billion pound annual subsidy, authorised by the European Commission. With all the current noise about Europe, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is about time we sorted out that issue, as the Select Committee on European Scrutiny has chosen to do shortly?

Mr. Clapham: I am asking my right hon. Friend the Minister to consider what can be done to give aid to the UK coal industry. My right hon. Friend is, of course, aware that massive aid is paid to the German, French and Spanish industries.

I believe that the simplest way to give aid would be to pay the generators the difference between delivered international coal market prices and the UK price, so that the subsidy went to generators in the short term, until the industry was able to find stability. Assistance to preserve the industry is required because it is accepted that UK coal mining is the most productive in Europe. It is perverse that the French, German and Spanish coal industries should receive about £3.5 billion in state aids when they have no chance of becoming competitive.

In the Gallery this morning are miners from some of the threatened collieries. They are disappointed that help is given to other UK industries, but that the plight of their industry is not currently being taken into account. Their disappointment is all the greater because they know that coal prices will rise in future and that the absence of a competitive indigenous coal mining industry will make us less secure and far more dependent on imported fuels.

Looking at the other two thirds of the energy mix reveals good reasons why the Minister should consider providing an aid package to the coal industry. Gas reserves are depleting rapidly. The 1998 "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics" shows that on current use, proven plus probable reserves will last for only 14 more years. It is striking to compare that with the 1992 statistics, which predicted their lasting another 24 years. In six years, 10 years supply of gas has been "lost". The Department of Trade and Industry should focus on those statistics and help the UK coal industry in order to ensure that we do not become overdependent on imported gas and that we have a diverse energy mix.

In 1998, coal doubled its price advantage over gas as a fuel for power generation, yet coal burn continues to fall: it fell by 23 per cent. in the first half of 1999 and new gas-fired stations continue to be approved. The UK coal report for October compared the prices of coal and gas, and revealed that coal is a significantly cheaper generating fuel than gas: gas generation costs 1.4p per kWh, whereas coal generation costs 1.16p per kWh, so coal has a fairly large margin of advantage over gas. Against that background, it is extremely disappointing that section 36 consents and section 14 consents to build more gas-fired power stations continue to be granted. I hope that the Minister will tell us that she intends to ensure that the moratorium is strictly observed in future, perhaps until the proposed changes resulting from the pool review have bedded down.

Nuclear power carries inherent risks and waste storage problems remain unresolved. The recent accident at Tokaimura in Japan reminds us of the enormous risks involved in nuclear energy. Most nuclear stations in the UK are operating beyond their design lives. Earlier this year, the nuclear installation inspectorate expressed concern about staffing levels at some nuclear power stations; the full report, when published, should make interesting reading. It is fair to predict that the next few years will bring the decommissioning of some of the older nuclear power stations. Those factors and a need to avoid overdependence on gas imports are reasons why we should ensure the survival of a UK coal industry.

Viewing the industry in the context of our environmental obligations gives rise to some concern, because the Environment Agency's tight emission policy poses a threat. That policy far exceeds our environmental obligations and unless rationality prevails, it could become another factor that helps to strangle the coal industry. I accept that we have to face up to our environmental commitments and no one suggests otherwise; however, those commitments must be balanced within an appropriate energy framework.

If we are to increase generation from coal-fired stations to make up the loss when the nuclear power stations are decommissioned and to restrict gas, we need more meaningful investment in clean coal technology. Clean coal demonstration plants should be built now to prepare the way for the higher efficiency coal plants that will be required to replace the old, low efficiency plants. The Government must act now if the United Kingdom coal industry is to be retained as a viable part of the energy mix.

The Government could consider taking several actions now. For example, they could end the section 36 and section 14 consents. They could consider bringing forward negotiations on the French interconnector to enable the contracts to be renegotiated. When the Select Committee on Trade and Industry reported on the coal industry in 1993, it suggested that there should be reciprocal arrangements so that as much electricity could be sent through the interconnector to France as was received in this country.

There should be more investment in clean coal plant, and action should be taken to protect the UK coal industry against dumping from eastern Europe. We have heard recently about dumping Polish coal. The letter from Tower colliery mentions the threat that it faces from dumped coal.

The Minister should consider regional selective assistance or some other aid package for the industry. The aid should be paid to the generators to make up the price difference, as I suggested earlier. Failure to act now could lead to a speedy demise of the UK coal industry. If a sane and sensible energy policy with a proportion of UK coal burn is to be retained in future, we must act decisively.

The Minister has considered and responded to the coalfield task force report, which the Deputy Prime Minister instigated to examine how the victimised miners' pensions might be reinstated. At what stage are those inquiries? How long will it be before progress is made?

9.52 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I am grateful that the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) has been able to arrange the debate for today. It could not have been more timely for Ellington colliery in my constituency. The hon. Gentleman referred to its closure in his remarks. The Ellington problem is part of the coal industry's wider problems, and I shall begin by considering Ellington specifically.

When I was elected, there were three working pits in my constituency which employed 3,500 men. We retain the last working pit in the north-east of England where 430 men are in work and make a massive contribution to a local economy that currently has little else. The closure of Ellington colliery would be a disaster for an area that stretches for many miles; it would affect several other constituencies. The pit had more than 1,000 jobs when it was closed by British Coal and reopened by RJB Mining. The much smaller work force profitably produces larger quantities of coal than its predecessors. That is a remarkable achievement. The pit employs people from a wide area—from Alnwick to Amble, Hadston, Widdrington, Lynemouth and Ellington, as well as many men in adjoining constituencies such as Blyth Valley and Wansbeck.

A wider north anxiety—that the economy of the north is far behind that of the rest of the country—forms the background to the worries about Ellington. Newspaper headlines such as, "What about the North, Mr. Blair?", reflect a general feeling that the north is in no position to cope with a blow such as the closure of Ellington colliery. The measures that have been announced so far cannot deal with the consequences.

The pit is in an area of serious unemployment, and many of the measures that the Government propose as alternatives to keeping the pit open have been used in dealing with earlier pit closures. They have not created anything like the increase in the number of jobs that the area needs to cope with the 1,000 jobs that have already been lost at Ellington colliery, let alone the 400 that will be lost if the pit closes in February.

Ellington feeds its coal directly to the Alcan power station, which powers the Alcan smelter. It would be hard to imagine a more efficient arrangement for coal. There are no transport costs and thus no environmental consequences of transporting coal around the country. Ellington uses the best method of transferring coal. However, the coal contract with Alcan belongs to RJB Mining and the idea that someone else could buy the pit without the contract is ludicrous. The RJB press release stated that the company would be interested in offers to take over the pit. No one will take it over without the contract to feed the coal straight to Alcan.

RJB Mining has massive opencast resources in Northumberland. It has the lion's share of the large amount of opencast mining in Northumberland. My constituency has the largest amount in the country. Local residents were told that they had to accept opencast mining because it was necessary to keep the deep mine open; that, without the sweetener of opencast coal and its lower price, we could not keep the deep mine open. Now, we have opencast, but we will not have the deep mine unless drastic action is taken.

As the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone pointed out, the coal market is unnaturally depressed at the moment. No one believes that the coal price will remain at its current low level. No one assumes that the coal market will be easy in future, but it is generally accepted that the current price is unrealistically low. The state of the market is assisted by massive subsidies, such as £3 billion to £4 billion a year in European Union countries and those in other countries too—leaving aside the current level of subsidy in Poland.

Therefore, we must put the case for some assistance for the coal industry over this difficult period. Otherwise, when the market settles down to a sensible level, there will be no British coal industry to take advantage of it. We cannot simply open and shut down the British coal industry at a moment's notice; pits cannot be closed and quickly reopened. Once pits are closed, they are usually lost permanently. That will happen at Ellington.

We have met the Minister and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who were ready to meet us at short notice and to consider the matter. However, we were presented with the strict doctrinaire view that the Government would not grant any state aid to the coal industry. That is an uncomfortable position for the Government to take when the coal market is in such an unnatural state. The Government's view constituted a curious unilateralism: they claimed that, if we did not provide state aid, all other countries would stop providing it. I can understand why the Government want to end the distortions of the coal market that state aid creates. However, we cannot do that by letting our coal industry go simply to show how damaging a subsidised coal market can be. That is an absurd position.

We must ensure that our coal industry can survive this period at least at a minimal level. Heaven knows, the British coal industry is now smaller than anyone could imagine. Instead of sitting back, allowing the industry to be destroyed and then claiming, "We told you so; we told you that state aid was a bad thing", the Government should take a more pragmatic view and find a way of assisting the industry through this period.

The objective of European-approved aid for the coal industry is viability. Ellington can be viable if it is allowed to continue to fulfil its Alcan contract in the next three or four years, and receives assistance to meet the additional costs resulting from sandstone layers that have been found and to bridge the price gap. That might lead to the possibility of reconsidering the longer-term reserves that exist at Ellington. Although the first move into the northerly part of the pit's potential reserves yielded coal that might have been unsuitable for generation, there is no evidence to suggest that coal a little further away would not be highly suitable for power generation. That possibility could be explored if the pit were kept going.

The previous Government introduced a scheme in 1993—they did not spend very much money on it—and it provides a model for what could be done. However, it is not the only model. As has been suggested already, we do not have to provide a direct subsidy to the coal producer; it could be a subsidy to the generators and many people would feel more comfortable with that. One way

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

or another, it is essential to try to bridge the price gap in that short period. This country has the lowest production costs for coal in Europe, but we are allowing the industry to go to the wall because production costs are subsidised elsewhere and there is an unnatural condition in the coal market.

I was disturbed that Ministers did not tell us that, although they were worried and although there were legal difficulties, they would consider whether a scheme could be devised to meet European criteria. There has been state aid to the coal industry in Britain, so it is not a question of suddenly introducing it. It existed under the 1993 scheme and £12 million was paid out under it. Therefore, there is a baseline from which we can operate. Ministers did not say that they would consider what could be achieved and that they would consult the Treasury to see whether they could find the money. There was none of that. They simply said, "No. That is not part of the doctrine. We do not do this sort of thing." We cannot take such a rigid and doctrinaire line when we are looking at the possible disappearance of an industry in conditions that are artificial—and that are made artificial in part by subsidies elsewhere.

The wider issues that go far beyond Ellington have already been mentioned and other Members will raise them in the debate. If we have no domestic coal industry, we will almost certainly do fatal damage to our mining engineering industry and to the production of mining equipment in this country. We need a domestic industry to ensure that we are in the forefront in the development of technology in mining engineering and in the sales of mining equipment. Big potential markets for mining equipment will exist particularly in the far east where there will be deep mining. We should ensure that we have an industry that can take advantage of the opportunities presented by that.

In many other parts of the country, closures, such as the one now planned for Ellington, would have a disastrous effect on local jobs. The problem is not peculiar to my constituency, but the impact on my constituency and a couple of neighbouring ones will be devastating. I have seen no evidence that we shall receive the scale of assistance that could begin to match the jobs already lost, let alone those that will be added to the total.

There must be a major rethink about how parts of the north-east are funded. We need to consider education funding, health funding and why we do not have something like the Barnett formula, which examines needs in the region, if we are even to begin to tackle the problem. In addition, we must consider specific aids that are designed to bring in jobs on the necessary scale to replace the mining jobs that have been lost. That will not be accomplished overnight, so I ask the Minister to consider whether a scheme, which would meet European Union criteria, could be introduced for a short period. Such a scheme would not be inordinately expensive in comparison to aids given to other industries and it would keep those 430 jobs in existence over the next few years. That would an extremely valuable thing for the Minister to do. I simply cannot understand the attitude that says, "We cannot even consider that." I urge her to reconsider urgently.

10.3 am

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing such an important and timely debate. I shall concentrate my remarks on reinforcing those made by the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith).

The recent announcement of the closure of Ellington, the colliery I worked at until 1994, will effectively end 600 years of coal mining in the great northern coalfield. It will consign 430 men to the dole unless a rescue package can be put together or unless the colliery is sold to a new owner.

Ellington is an important regional asset. It played a major role under both the National Coal Board and British Coal, consistently making a profit. It has made a profit every year under RJB Mining, employing only one third of the work force that existed under British Coal and producing nearly 1 million tonnes of coal a year. That is a magnificent achievement by all concerned, but their reward for that is the sack.

Mr. Budge claims that the colliery faces severe geological conditions and puts it up for sale. To ensure that he attracts a buyer, he takes away the market that Ellington now has with Alcan. That is an insult to everyone who works at the colliery.

I have no doubt, as do the work force, that Ellington has the potential for a long and viable future. There are known reserves at the pit of about 300 million tonnes, which represent fuel to power the next millennium. In order to mine that coal, Ellington needs investment, but that investment has not been made by RJB Mining. There is no doubt that Mr. Budge's company is directly responsible for the announced closure.

However, if Ellington can be assisted through the next four years, a decent future is possible. The pit can continue to supply Alcan and, during the next four years, we are endeavouring to build a new clean coal power station. The Wansbeck Energy Company has received its second tranche of European funding for a full feasibility study into such a project, where we hope to develop on site not only a power plant, but a clean energy centre, manufacturing wind turbines and developing photovoltaics and other forms of renewable energy. Ellington's survival is key to that visionary project.

About £10 million is required to ensure continued production and it would guarantee 430 jobs for the next four to five years. It is fairly obvious that RJB Mining has no intention of investing that sort of money. Sadly, for Mr. Budge, investing in Australia and Indonesia is infinitely preferable to investing in this country. To bleed his UK coal industry to invest abroad is a disgraceful state of affairs. I therefore make no appeals on behalf of RJB Mining.

I appeal, on behalf of the 430 miners who work at Ellington and their families, for the Government to intervene, to grant aid and, if necessary, to subsidise Ellington to protect those jobs. There is an overwhelming social case and a powerful economic case for that. More importantly, the Government have an opportunity to give something back to communities who have given so much to this nation.

There is also an overwhelming social case for assistance. The area surrounding Ellington has been in decline for more than 20 years. We have development

area status, but need an enterprise zone. I urge the Government—whatever happens to Ellington—to provide an enterprise zone for the area. The problems of previous closures are many and varied. The area has been described as an inner city pulled apart. It has been made much worse by the 18 years of neglect and wilful destruction carried out by the previous Tory Government. We have objective 2 and 5b status when, statistically, we qualify for objective 1. With the exception of football, we are at the top of all the bad leagues and at the bottom of all the good ones.

Ellington underpins the local economy, which is still very fragile. Some £10 million each year is paid in wages and we cannot afford to lose that. The only guarantee of a job for the 430 men who work at the colliery is the one that they now have. Despite all the schemes for retraining, the task forces and national, European and regional funding, unemployment is still more than twice the national average.

I am delighted to say that the Government are attempting to address those issues through improved economic development, education and health action zones and all the mainstream improvements that have been announced over the past two and a half years. The closure of Ellington will set that work back even further. There is a powerful economic case to be made. Some £10 million over four to five years will guarantee jobs for the 430 people who work there and will provide an opportunity for work for many more years to come.

Subsidies to private industry are given in one form or another every day—from farming to car manufacturing, although there is, I might add, over-production in both industries. I have no difficulties with such support. In one case, jobs are preserved and expanded; in the other, it preserves a way of life. However, what is good for one industry is surely good for another. Ellington needs regional assistance to re-equip its powered roof supports in order to mine the available coal. The Government can, if they so wish, provide such a subsidy for UK coal. I urge the Minister to make such a case in Europe.

I have touched only on the social and economic arguments, but, in conclusion, I make one last appeal, which stands above all others. Let this Government—on behalf of the nation—give something back to the communities who so desperately need it. On the eve of armistice day, I remind the House that this may be the last chance to make such an appeal for the mining industry. I remind the House of the contribution made to freedom and democracy, and to the wealth of this nation, by miners and our communities. Mining villages the length and breadth of the land have two memorials to our fallen. From Ypres to the Somme and from Tobruk to Arnhem, miners paid the ultimate sacrifice. From the disasters of West Stanley to Hartley, from Easington to Woodhorn, mining communities paid dearly to fuel the industrial revolution and to power this century.

For nearly 20 years, Labour politicians have watched the destruction of Britain's mining industry and have been unable to do anything at all. We now have the power to do something about that destruction. We can make a genuine difference. On behalf of the mining community that I represent, I ask that this Government—our Government—intervene to protect 430 much-needed jobs.

10.11 am

Dr. Michael Clark (Rayleigh): I shall speak briefly, as we were asked to do so that other Members could speak. It will be easy for me to be brief, because I want only to support the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham). I congratulate him on initiating the debate.

The hon. Member will remember that he and I served on the Select Committee on Trade and Industry; many other hon. Members will recall the late, lamented Energy Committee, which did such a good job to protect energy in general and the coal industry in particular. The hon. Member will remember that, when we joined the Trade and Industry Committee in 1992, we intended to look at a range of issues, although when I suggested that the Committee examine the coal industry, I was told by one of its senior Conservative members that that would be a reverse takeover of the Trade and Industry Committee by the Energy Committee.

However, within a matter of weeks, we were engaged in a serious inquiry into the coal industry, due to the decision taken by the Conservative Government to shut 70 pits—in fact, only half were to be closed, and half were to be put into review. However, as many Labour Members will be aware, the review was a device for delayed closure and, at that time, we were left with only about 30 pits. There was death by stealth in the coal industry, and that continues at present. In opposition, Labour was going to do so much to help and save the industry, but the death of the industry by stealth continues under the Labour Government, as it did under the previous Conservative Government.

I reinforce two points made by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone. First, I was pleased that he referred to clean coal technology. Although we do not lack ideas, we lag behind in the development of that technology. It is a shame that we cannot make progress in that matter, so as to protect not only the coal industry, but our future fuel supplies.

Secondly, the hon. Member referred to the interconnector across the channel. Seven years ago, we gave much consideration to that matter. The amount of energy coming into this country from France is equivalent to the amount that could be obtained from four to five pits. Four or five pits have closed unnecessarily due to the fact that we are bringing in nuclear power subsidised by the French Government. That is not fair competition. That nuclear power is subsidised just as much as the Spanish, French and German coal that was referred to by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone.

I am pleased to follow the passionate speech made by the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy), who has worked in the industry and in the colliery that is now subject to closure. He said that he would not plead the case of RJB Mining—I can understand that. However, unless, to some extent, one pleads the case for RJB, one cannot argue for the coal industry. I realise that the hon. Gentleman wants to plead the case for the coal industry, and I am sure that he does so, but, in making that case, he will also be pleading for RJB. I know that he does not want to throw the baby out with the bath water.

Since it took over a vast chunk of the British coal industry, RJB has mined 150 million tonnes of coal—80 per cent. of which has gone to the power stations.

[Dr. Michael Clark]

The company received no subsidy, but, over the same time, Germany, France and Spain spent £14.5 billion on subsidy. That works out at almost £49 a tonne—more than the selling price of British coal seven or eight years ago. It is a massive subsidy, which permits industry in those countries to have coal that is almost free.

RJB spent almost £400 million on new plant and the replacement of equipment, and a further £1,000 million on accessing new reserves—£1.4 billion is a big investment, but it is only one tenth of the subsidy that goes into the industry in France, Germany and Spain. The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone pointed out that British coal prices have come down from about 1.4p to 1.15p per gigajoule, but that the world price is between 70p and 80p. How can any coal mine in this country compete with world coal prices—or even European coal prices—without some Government assistance?

A graph of coal production over the past five years shows that, with their big subsidies, French and German output has been steady, and that Spanish output has gone up. The United Kingdom—where there is no Government assistance—is the only major mining country in Europe where output has gone down. As has been pointed out, 7,000 men are employed in RJB alone, and there are huge knock-on effects for those employed in the mining equipment companies referred to by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

I propose that the Government should give some assistance to the British coal industry—perhaps paid when coal is delivered to the power stations. As the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone suggested, coal could be sold to the power stations at prices similar to world prices. If we do not do that, we shall destroy what is left of our coal industry, at a time when gas reserves are being depleted and oil is no longer being found at previous rates. We shall want more and more energy, but we will have isolated much of our coal energy underground.

I do not really believe in subsidies—I believe in competition and free markets. I believe in level playing fields. However, they do not exist for the French, the German and the Spanish. If we cannot have a level playing field for competition and free markets, let us have one for subsidy. If some people say, as Governments—whether Labour or Conservative—have done, that it is not possible for us to subsidise our coal industry, they should remember that the European Commission, when defending subsidies paid to the German coal industry, made it clear that the UK had the right to subsidise its industry if it wanted to. In the absence of that assistance, the conclusion must be drawn that the British Government do not want to help the coal industry. I am aware that the Government have enormous sympathy with the industry, but that will not keep the pits alive—at some stage, there has to be cash.

10.20 am

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I shall not speak for too long because I know that many hon. Members want to take part in the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing this debate, which is timely in the light of the closure of Ellington pit.

Let us take our minds back a few years to when miners and their families and communities came to London in their thousands upon thousands. It is reckoned that those on the countryside march have since outstripped that number, although, at the time, the miners' march was certainly the biggest that we had known. The Tory Government did not take a blind bit of notice of the feelings of those miners and marchers. It is interesting that the Tories are now taking into account the concerns of those in the countryside in their communities, but that the miners were left to die at the wayside. Given what is happening now, the debate is a timely reminder of what happened then.

Today, the coal industry is in the throes of dying. Along with others, I plead for something to be done. We must remind ourselves that RJB Mining bought the industry at a give-away price. In fact, it would not be a bad idea to renationalise the industry at that price, give Mr. Budge his money back and tell him to go to Australia.

The crux of the matter is that Mr. Budge is investing thousands of pounds in an opencast mine somewhere in Australia and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) said, in mines in other countries, too. I wonder why. Is RJB Mining to become a core cartel? Will Mr. Budge, with the help of the Government and the Tories, bring an end to the coal industry in this country, so that he can import coal from Australia and all the other countries in which he is investing his money—money made by the British miners?

No Government subsidy has been given, so Mr. Budge can claim that he did not get anything from them—apart from cheap pits—nevertheless, it is unfair of him to ask for money to keep British mines open when he is investing his money abroad. It should be made very plain that this guy is ripping off British miners and taxpayers. It is unfair that the British taxpayer should be asked to give him money while he is investing it abroad.

The industry is a two-way business. Although it is not to our liking, the coal industry is privatised, so RJB Mining should put its money where its mouth is. At the moment, all it is doing is making a profit from the pits, but, as soon as they hit trouble—such things happen to pits; they are living things—they are closed. That is not good for the industry. Mr. Budge has a responsibility. He could meet the Minister and offer to invest millions of pounds in Ellington colliery, provided that the Government help out, but he does not want to do so. All he wants is to get his money, close the pits and be away to somewhere else. All we want is a partnership.

My plea, and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), for the Prime Minister to renationalise the pits has fallen on deaf ears because the Labour Government do not want to take such a course. The pits should be renationalised. There must be a partnership; no one man should ask for subsidies while investing elsewhere. I plead with RJB Mining—not the Government—to show us the colour of its money. Perhaps then it will get some money out of the Government.

10.23 am

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Those of us who voted against the pit closure programme remember extremely well the sound and fury at the time, not only against the Government but from Labour Members, who claimed that they believed in the coal industry. I shall not utter a word

of criticism of any Labour Back Bencher who is taking part in this debate because I know how they are constrained and how much they are fighting for the interests of coal miners. I accuse the Government.

For example, in his pre-Budget statement only yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer talked about the gas, electricity and water regulators promoting competition. What about the coal industry? I should like to hear a little about that. We know that the Chancellor has £9 billion in his so-called war chest. Why is he not using that money to help coal miners? Will somebody tell me? Will the Minister reply to that point, because I should like to know? On behalf of the miners, I am very angry with the Government because of their hypocrisy. Labour Members stirred up feelings while the previous Government were in office, but Labour, in government, is doing exactly the same as its predecessor. They are a bunch of hypocrites.

The Government are doing nothing to help. If Labour Back Benchers are not prepared to say this, I shall say it for them: the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Dr. Clark) on subsidies are absolutely true. It is possible for the Government to provide subsidies, but they will not do so. Can do, but will not is the truth of the matter. The miners are left to take account of that fact and to take it out on the Government for their complete failure to look after mining interests.

The European issue has also provoked sound and fury. I have just heard the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) talking about obeying the European rules. To do so may be one thing, but what are such rules supposed to achieve? We have problems at the moment with the French on beef, but on coal, the rules are wrong. They are canted and stacked against the British coal miner and the British coal industry.

Recently, in my constituency, a massive series of grants have been made in order, in the words of the Government representative, to capture what is known as the Grindley lane site for major investment. Such grants have been used to bribe and blackmail people into accepting the site. Up the road at Madeley, next to Silverdale, where the miners in my constituency have worked and slaved for years, but which is being closed—as is Trentham—not a penny of that money is being made available.

The Government are absolutely hypocritical, and it is time that their Back Benchers turned on them. What we hear about public services can be applied to the coal industry as well. It is time that the British people woke up to the fact that most of this stuff is being driven by a craven surrendering to a European regime. That is the name of the game, and everyone in the House knows it.

10.28 am

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing the debate and on his very able speech. I must declare an interest: I am a consultant to Scottish Coal. My speech will concentrate on the critical financial difficulties in which the Scottish coal industry finds itself due to the problems of delivering opencast coal to customers down south in England.

The problem arises from the fact that a rail company, EWS, has given priority to moving by rail foreign coal that is unloaded at the deep-water port of Hunterston. EWS has a near monopoly in handling bulk freight, and has taken capacity from indigenous coal producers in order to satisfy the contract for imported coal. The loss of revenue to Scottish Coal from the sale—or non-sale—of coal costs £500,000 a week. The knock-on effect is obvious.

The coal produced in Scotland is low in sulphur and is blended with high-sulphur coal from deep mines in England, which makes the coal acceptable to generating units. The resulting cash flow problems in Scotland and England affect the viability of deep mines and miners' jobs.

The haemorrhage of money cannot go on. Foreign coal poses a threat due to the strength of the pound and direct and indirect subsidies by foreign Governments and multinationals. In South Africa, rail companies are subsidised to bring coal to ports. Polish coal subsidies have been mentioned, while in the case of Colombian coal, negotiations take place at the point of a gun.

If we are to have a coal industry in the United Kingdom, the Government must step in. All foreign coal is bought in American dollars, and that causes a balance of payments crisis. Every tonne of British coal that is burnt represents a saving to the Exchequer and a job in the UK. It is logical that the Government should take an interest, in the short term and the long term, if the coal industry is to survive.

I make one special plea. The freight problem cannot wait to be solved. It must be given a higher priority, because a week of costs at £500,000 is a week too long.

10.33 am

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): In the interests of brevity, I shall refer to just two issues that have been mentioned in the debate, and try to impress upon the Minister the need to consider seriously the issues that confront the industry. The first issue is that of jobs, which are influenced by coal stocks, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) said. Secondly, I want to draw attention to the interest in clean coal technology.

The Government could give assistance in both respects. The suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone should be seriously considered. We should be helping the coal industry by allowing coal to be delivered to power stations at a price equal to that of subsidised imported coal. I see no difficulty with that, and I shall state my reasons.

The development and engineering of clean coal technology would be in the interests of the country, especially the mining industry. That technology is proven. We had the Grimethorpe scheme, which, incidentally, was sold by the previous Government when we were so near to success. That was a crime. It was a sin on their part. If they had not sold the scheme, we could have been operating that system now. However, it is not too late for us to pursue that option.

In doing justice to the mining industry, we have no need to look for taxpayer's money. Since 1994, when the Government became guarantor of the mineworkers pension scheme and staff superannuation fund, more than £1,000 million in interest has been paid into the Chancellor's coffers. We could recycle back into the industry some of those funds—funds that have been paid by the miners and the industry in the past, and which are now being channelled into Treasury.

[Mr. Bill O'Brien]

I make a plea to the Minister that we now need joined-up government. We need the Chancellor of the Exchequer to release some of the money that he has received, not from taxpayers as such, but from the industry. We could then set up a public-private partnership to develop clean coal technology. That technology is a success story, ripe for development, and there is no reason for us to delay in setting up a PPP. We could use the funds that have already been generated. Moreover, further funding from those pension schemes is guaranteed, because when they are revalued there is always an increase, which is paid to the Chancellor.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): We have spoken about renationalisation of the coal industry as though it were a bridge too far, but given RJB's share price at the moment—the valuation of that company—it would be far cheaper and easier to buy the company back into public ownership.

Mr. O'Brien: The funds that I mentioned might be used for that purpose.

Let me tell the Minister that if we sincerely want to support the mining industry—as the Government declared on being elected in 1997—we can do that without subsidies from the taxpayer, by using money that has been generated in the mining industry. Now is the time to make an approach to the Treasury to ask to use some of the money that we accrued in the industry—money which I and other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate contributed. That is one way in which we can save the industry and develop clean coal technology, which will see the industry through the next century.

I plead with the Minister to take those two points on board, because that would improve the miners' lot.

10.36 am

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Many of my hon. Friends have made the arguments that I wished to make. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on initiating the debate and on his continuing fight for our coal industry. He is second to none in his efforts on behalf of that industry.

The speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) reminded me of my fight for the Tower colliery, in Cynon valley, during 1994. At that time, I advanced in the Chamber the very arguments that my hon. Friend made. I know how strongly he feels, as I felt strongly at that time.

In 1995, the miners of Tower colliery, the last deep mine in Wales, became owners of the pit. In the first year, they made pre-tax profits of £3.5 million. I can remember the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who was then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, arguing that there was no future for Tower colliery—that it was finished. He sent one of his Ministers to the Tea Room and said, "Tell the men to throw in the towel", and I answered, "Tell them yourself."

The miners of Tower did not throw in the towel. They launched their own bid, with their redundancy money, to buy the pit. Two hundred and twenty-eight miners each put up £8,000 to buy that pit, and it re-opened on 2 January 1995. Those miner owners have set up a fully co-operative structure. They have an open management, with worker directors who are accountable to the work force, as well as one person, one vote decision making. Shares must be returned to the company by those who leave the pit, and they cannot be bought by outsiders. Such a scheme could be repeated elsewhere.

Tower colliery employs 400 people from the valleys of south Wales—still an area of high unemployment and deprivation. In my constituency, 12.6 per cent. of workers are still unemployed. The colliery offers well-paid jobs, and there is a spin-off of about £10 million a year to the economy of the Cynon valley. Therefore the industry is very important.

Tower has consistently invested in the future, with heavy financial costs in the development of the mine and the infrastructure. It would like to develop other parts of the mine, which would produce coal directly for Aberthaw power station, but that development is costly and, due to present uncertainties described by my hon. Friends, it is unable to go ahead. Tower pit pays more than £5 million annually to the state, in addition to the £8 million paid to the Government to buy the pit, and it is still paying back another £2 million. We should remember that the pit has a very important contribution to make to the economy of south Wales, especially the Cynon valley.

I urge my hon. Friends not to throw in the towel, but to keep on fighting. I also urge my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Competitiveness in Europe to reply sympathetically to the strong case made for coal. There is a case for it, which should be answered by the Government. It was not answered by the previous Conservative Government, but I hope that this Government will show greater understanding and sympathy.

Finally, on a lighter note, the story of Tower has been put to music. There is an opera called "Tower", which opened in south Wales three weeks ago and is now touring Wales. It tells the story in music and song. It could come to England, but the Arts Council of England has turned down an appeal for a grant, saying that there is no interest in England. Anyone who heard my hon. Friends today would know that such an interest exists. May I tell my hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts that my constituency was twinned with Islington during the miners' strike, so there is an interest in Islington, in the north of England and in Scotland, and the Arts Council of England should change its mind?

10.41 am

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing an important debate, and I welcome the right hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell) to her place in her first key debate as the Minister with responsibility for energy at the Department of Trade and Industry.

There is no doubt that the coal industry has suffered enormously over the past 15 years. Economics and the environment were the principal reasons for pit closures in the 1990s, and now the driving forces are the environment and subsidies in Germany, Spain, France and Poland, which are almost certainly illegal.

It is particularly tragic that Ellington is to close at a time when alternative employment in manufacturing in the north-east is under threat from Government policies that have pushed manufacturing into recession, from which it is just emerging.

I have enormous sympathy for some of the more honest old Labour Members of Parliament, who fought the election on the expectation that the coal industry would be protected under a Labour Government. Labour raised expectations that the coal industry would be safe in its hands. The new Labour leadership must have known that that was not true, because in its manifesto the Labour party made it clear that it would fight global warming through a new target of a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions by 2010.

The Labour party in opposition gave miners and the coal industry the cosy reassurance that coal mining jobs would be safe, yet the Deputy Prime Minister has signed Britain up to achieving an even higher CO_2 emission target than that demanded by Kyoto. This debate, therefore, is not just about coal or gas or electricity; it is about how the Government can marry the target to which they signed up with their implicit promises to the coal industry.

I refer the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry report on the coal industry, which states that

"the Kyoto greenhouse gas emission targets, together with the UK's 1997 commitment to a 20 per cent. cut in 1990 levels of CO_2 by 2010 . . . represent a more dramatic increase in environmental pressures on coal than anything foreseen in 1993, and on a far tighter timescale."

The right hon. Lady's written answer to my question about European coal subsidies contained reassuring but unconvincing language, but, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Dr. Clark) and by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), the fact is that last year, according to RJB Mining, Germany, France and Spain subsidised their coal industries by £3.2 billion, a highly unfair and probably illegal subsidy. Perhaps that should be called the Midlothian question. It shows a huge gap between the new Labour message and the new Labour reality.

The biggest deceit of all is contained in the Government's White Paper on energy, which seeks to justify the gas moratorium on the grounds that it will protect the coal industry—a view, incidentally, that is not shared by many outside the Government. The Labour- dominated Select Committee on Trade and Industry stated:

"We do not believe that this moratorium on section 36 . . . consents for new power stations will assist the coal industry in the short run . . . we look to the Government to ensure that . . . the moratorium is lifted as soon as practicable."

The Government, whose Deputy Prime Minister had signed up to some challenging CO_2 targets, found that some of his colleagues were worried about the effect that that would have on the coal industry. The Government decided that they must be seen to be doing something to appease those members, and accordingly embarked on a gas moratorium, despite the fact that they know and the whole world knows that it will do nothing to help the coal industry.

The Government claim in the White Paper that the dash for gas has been artificially encouraged by distortions in the electricity market and by inadequate competition in generation. The argument is that both of those factors have artificially raised the market price of electricity, thus encouraging new gas-fired power stations to be built.

No one questions the importance of the reforms to the electricity pool or of competition in electricity generation, but the idea that companies would invest millions of pounds without considering the future price of electricity is nonsense. It make a mockery of the reasoning behind the gas moratorium set out in the White Paper.

The moratorium is resulting in higher electricity prices than would otherwise be the case, and significantly higher CO_2 emissions, and is leading to further downgrading of the competitiveness of British industry.

The next great deceit in the Government's arguments for the gas moratorium relates to the environment. Combined cycle gas turbine stations emit about half the level of CO_2 emitted by a conventional power station, but because of the increased use of gas over the years and increased output from nuclear power, the CO_2 emissions from electricity generation have already fallen below 1990 levels.

That is why the White Paper states that the Government

"would expect to see a decline in CO_2 emissions from the power generation sector over the period covered by the Kyoto Protocol",

even on scenarios that retain the gas moratorium in the years 2008 to 2012. Therein lies the deception. From 2010, if not earlier, as was pointed out by other hon. Members, the UK will have to begin to decommission Magnox nuclear power stations.

Thus the Government's environmental policy is geared solely to meeting the Kyoto target of 2008 to 2012. The fact that in the years after 2012 the CO_2 emissions are likely to rise is, as far as the Government are concerned, irrelevant. In other words, the Government are living for the short term and taking no steps to deal with the position after 2012.

The third great deception in the Government's argument behind the gas moratorium involves security of supply. Britain has total remaining gas reserves which at current production rates will last between 23 and 35 years. That is stated in appendix C of the Government's White Paper on energy. That is why the Labour-dominated Select Committee on Trade and Industry concluded:

"There are no reasons on grounds of security of supply, or in terms of confidence in long-term availability, to resist the growing use of gas."

That is the final deceit. The gas moratorium will not protect the coal industry, its purpose is not to protect hapless companies from mistakenly building gas-fired power stations in response to short-term artificial prices, and it will not help with the security of electricity supply. However, the gas moratorium will add to the price of electricity and will lead to higher CO_2 emissions than would otherwise be the case. For those reasons, we believe that the gas moratorium should end.

The difficulties faced by the British coal industry are real and have been exacerbated by the Deputy Prime Minister and by illegal European subsidies. The real concerns and real difficulties should be addressed by the Government through real policies and real remedies, not through an artificial policy that will do nothing to help, but which will damage British industry and the environment.

10.49 am

The Minister for Energy and Competitiveness in Europe (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I join colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley,

[Mrs. Helen Liddell]

West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on securing the debate. He is a great advocate for the coal industry and the people who work in it. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has never lost sight of the fact that it is the people in the industry who suffer as a consequence of decline in that industry. He mentioned my empathy with the industry—I have great empathy with it. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) asked me to listen sympathetically to the debate. I assure the House that I have listened sympathetically. I am also conscious that a substantial number of my hon. Friends have not been successful in catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of the pressure of time. I undertake to meet them as soon as possible in a setting that will allow them the time to make the points that they wish to make. I am happy to do that at any time.

I have listened carefully to the considered points that my hon. Friends have made, but as I have only 10 minutes to reply, I shall write to them with detailed responses to the points that I am unable to answer now. I want to provide as much access as possible to Members who represent mining communities. These are challenging times, and there are challenging times ahead. We shall not walk away from our mining communities. Given my history, I would not be following my conscience if I walked away from the mining communities that sent me here. Indeed, on a lighter note, I am one of the few women honorary members of the National Union of Mineworkers. I was invited to join by the late Michael McGahey, who was born and brought up in my constituency.

The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) welcomed me to the Front Bench very graciously, and I thank him for that, but I am not going to take any lectures from a Tory on what should happen to the coal industry. The gall of some people who come to the House and posture about it angers me, so I shall draw attention to what happened under the previous Government.

In 1980, slightly more than 230,000 men were employed in the coal mining industry; by 1997, the figure had fallen to 12,600. Every one of us who comes from a mining community knows the cost of that. We know the suffering that was caused because of the politically driven vendetta against those communities. More importantly, the Government have to deal with the legacy of the Conservative Government's incompetence. We are facing up to the responsibility that we have as a Government for the toll taken on miners' health by the coal industry and, by reducing the distortions that were forcing coal out of the electricity market, we are dealing with the legacy that the previous Administration left the coal industry

Hon. Members have referred to the stricter gas consents policy. I shall take up a point made by the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, who wants the moratorium on that policy to be lifted. It has been painful to refuse a lot of those power station applications, because some of my hon. Friends have told me that they want gas-fired power stations to meet particular needs in their constituencies. However, because we recognise that the coal industry must be given a level playing field, we have been prepared to act. We must have security and diversity of supply. We have turned down 4 GW of gas-fired generation, which is equivalent to 10 million tonnes of coal—roughly half the output of RJB Mining. If that is not helping the coal industry, I do not know what is.

Mr. Cash: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No, I am not taking interventions from the hon. Gentleman. I am surprised that he is on his feet, because I have not said the magic word "Europe". That usually brings him out of his box.

We have introduced a programme of radical and far-reaching reform aimed at ensuring that the coal industry has a secure future, but I shall not delude anyone—there are still difficult days ahead. I was surprised by the tone adopted by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) following the meeting that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I had about Ellington with the affected constituents. We made it clear that we would examine every possible legal means of assisting the coal industry.

Questions were raised about the investment that miners have made and the profitability that they have achieved—that point was made strongly by my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell). I have to point out that RJB amassed profits adding up to £550 million from 1995 to 1998. In the first six months of this year, it had declared profits of £4 million, which it distributed in dividends. Pressure should not be put on the Government to pick up the costs when the private sector makes such profits. It is important to bear that in mind. I can assure the miners of this country that we will do everything to ensure that our energy markets support the future of the coal industry.

A number of my hon. Friends referred to coal pits that have a strong future, and much has been said about subsidised and unfairly priced coal imports. I appreciate the points that have been made, and the Government have acted on unfair subsidies. A number of hon. Members referred to Polish coal. A lot of people have expressed to us their concerns about dumping. I give a commitment that I shall seek to meet my Polish opposite number as soon as possible to raise that matter.

My hon. Friends asked for specific aid for the coal industry and referred to the European energy markets. Over the past few years, we have fought hard for liberalisation of those markets, and I recognise the difficulties caused by the one-way traffic of electricity from France. I have met my opposite number—indeed, I addressed a seminar in the Assemblée Nationale specifically on that issue—and shall do so again next week, and I have approached the European Commission to make sure that there is true liberalisation of energy markets in France. My hon. Friends raised the issue of the French interconnector, of which we are very much aware. The matter is covered by treaty, but, notwithstanding that, we are anxious for progress to be made.

As we said in the White Paper in response to the industry, we seek to create a climate of fairness, not favours. That is what we have delivered and what we shall continue to deliver, but we have to be realistic. Investment in the UK coal industry is at a historically low level. Indeed, the main proprietor, RJB, is investing in Australia rather than the UK, which is an important signal that mines run out of economic resources. Pits also face geological challenges to which we must respond. We must

have mechanisms to help miners to achieve a secure future whenever economics and geology work against them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone asked me about victimised miners. The Government are very concerned about that issue, and I hope to be able to make an announcement soon about the means whereby we shall deal with their problems. I hope to set up a group that will look into those cases following the consultation that is to take place.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware of all the work that is being done in north Staffordshire on behalf of the victimised sacked miners, but is she aware that tremendous concern still exists? We want a test centre to assess cases of vibration white finger. Will she look into that issue urgently?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend has fought a good campaign, and she makes a sound point. Until now, we have had some difficulty over the availability of technicians who work on that condition. A strong case relating to it has been made for her area and, in the new year, I hope to be able to say something that she will find encouraging.

I am conscious that the industry has contributed a huge amount to our economy, and it has a future. The stricter gas consents policy is creating a more level playing field for the coal industry, but it cannot exist indefinitely. We have said that, once the pool reforms are in place, the moratorium will have to be lifted, but I say to the mining communities, from the bottom of my heart, that we will not turn our back on them. My hon. Friends know of my commitment to the industry. My door is always open, and we shall look seriously at every point that has been raised today with a view to finding a means whereby we can secure the future for the industry.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

11 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am particularly pleased to be able to introduce this debate, which I understand will be the last one-and-a-half-hour Back-Bench debate to take place in the Chamber before we begin holding debates in Westminster Hall in the new Session. There can be no more important issue for many Back Benchers than the workings of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, and the implications of its workings for rationing in the health service.

I am pleased to see that the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), is to respond. When I was a Liberal Democrat health spokesman, I spent many long hours discussing this and other issues with him, during the Committee and Report stages of the Health Bill, and in a Statutory Instrument Committee considering the orders setting up NICE. I am pleased that we shall be able to continue those discussions today.

Let me declare some interests. I am a fellow-elect of the Industry and Parliament Trust, which was established to give parliamentarians such as myself, who have no private-sector experience, experience of industry. My fellowship is with Glaxo Wellcome, with which—among other pharmaceutical companies—I have discussed the debate. I also went on a three-day study trip to an oncological conference in the United States, along with NHS clinicians and purchasers. The travel, which took place earlier this year, was funded by the pharmaceutical company Rhone-Poulenc Rorer.

Part of the subject of this debate is rationing, a word that the Government do not like using. Perhaps if I now define what I understand by it, we can talk in approximately the same terms, even if the Government do not accept my definition. Rationing of health care is caused by a mismatch between demand, or need, and the provision of services for which resources allow—and, indeed, the efficiency with which those services can be provided. When we talk of rationing in this context, we do not mean the system that operated during the war. We do not mean that everyone in the country receives a set ration of treatment that, once exhausted, cannot be used any more.

The Government have attempted to define away the problem by claiming that the Liberal Democrats—and, following a Damascene conversion in this Parliament, the Conservatives—are referring to rationing in that other sense, and that therefore it does not exist. When we speak of rationing, we mean that sometimes some treatments are not available when they would benefit patients or populations, because there simply are not the resources to provide all those treatments on the NHS.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Harris: I will in a moment.

Liberal Democrats believe that this kind of rationing is inevitable. To say that there cannot be rationing in any public-health sector is like saying that the earth is flat. There will always be pressures on the health service, and decisions will have to be made. Our point is that the existence of rationing should be recognised by the

[Dr. Harris]

population and admitted by the Government, so that the population can debate whether it wants to vote for more resources to reduce—not obliterate—the rationing that now exists. Clearly, more resources mean that more treatments would be affordable.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) now does not wish to intervene. Presumably I have answered his question.

The Government have a responsibility to conduct a public debate about rationing. Liberal Democrats would like nothing more than a discussion—at election times generally, but in particular at the next election, as no such discussion was held at the last election—about whether we should be putting significantly more money into the health service. Should we put in more—yea, if I may speak in biblical terms, even more than the Government say that they are putting in and will put in, in real terms—so that we can reduce the amount of rationing to the levels found in countries that spend a significantly higher proportion of their gross domestic product on health services generally, and the public-health sector in particular?

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): May I tease the hon. Gentleman slightly? When I checked the Liberal Democrat manifesto yesterday, I found that it identified not one penny of extra funds for medicines. There was a substantial list of items of additional spending on the health service, fully costed—to be paid for by the closing of a loophole involving national insurance contributions—but there was not a penny extra for drugs. As the Liberal Democrats also proposed to freeze prescription charges, there might have been even less money for drugs had they won the election.

Dr. Harris: There are two fallacies in that argument. The first is that the Liberal Democrats proposed to put in less money than Labour. We were clear about the fact that those were specific commitments over and above the Conservatives' spending plans, which also included an uplifting for inflation that was not included in the Government's calculations.

The hon. Gentleman's primary error, however, is that it is not, currently, for politicians to say, "This money is ring fenced for drugs." I shall be interested to see whether the Minister backs up his hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) by suggesting that the money from prescription charges is in a ring-fenced budget for spending on drugs, or that the Government allocate any funds specifically for that purpose. I think that we and the Government agree that health service spending in that sense should take place in a primary and secondary care setting, and that a clinical judgment should be made about whether to spend money on drugs, bed stay, operative intervention, aids or counselling. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's comments do not mean that he is in a drug-obsessed frame of mind.

As I have said, we need to hold a public debate on whether to spend more on the health service—the NHS, rather than private care. We need an honest debate about whether there should be tax cuts or more public spending. If the Conservative party—or the other Conservative party, in this context, the Labour party—wins that fair debate and wins an election on that basis, our position will clearly be more difficult to sustain, although we will still hold and express our present views. The point is that such a debate never took place at the last election. The Government said, "We will save the NHS, there is and will be no rationing, and well-off people can have tax cuts."

In yesterday's pre-Budget statement, a huge opportunity was missed to invest even more in the health service at a time when in my county, Oxfordshire, community hospitals are threatened with closure. We have been waiting for a decision from the Government for more than a year. Those hospitals are closing not because the beds are in the wrong place, or because no one needs them; they are closing because the community trust is short of £1.5 million. The closure proposal is a financial proposal, and, three years into their regime, the Government must take responsibility either by saying that they were wrong, or by saying that there will be health service cuts because they do not spend enough.

The Government set up NICE following a discussion paper called "Faster Access to Modern Treatment". That follows the trend of giving Government papers titles whose contents belie them: another example is an education paper called "Fair Funding", which has prompted more humour than any other such title that I have encountered. In their paper, the Government said that the big geographical variations in the provision of treatments or drugs were unacceptable. We agree wholeheartedly; indeed, we would go further, and point out that many such unacceptable variations—postcode prescribing—are a function of the fact that there is rationing in the health service due to underfunding.

Some health authorities may well fund proper treatment for multiple sclerosis sufferers with beta interferon, but not fund medium-secure mental health beds. Other authorities may choose to spend what little they have on the provision of better mental health beds, but cut their drug budget for neurological disease. There is a patchwork of such inequalities throughout the country. The Government must recognise that the underlying cause is pressure on the health service budget. They do not have to take the blame, but they should at least recognise the fact.

NICE was set up to deal with that problem, but it cannot do so unless it deals with the underlying problem of shortage of resources in the health service and the unacceptable rationing of useful treatments. It was set up first to examine the clinical effectiveness of drugs, and then to examine their cost effectiveness. There was widespread support, including from me. We believed that, if that was as far as NICE went, giving its advice to the Government based on those two criteria, with certain concerns, that would be good. It would help to even out variations, and encourage clinicians to use new treatments more quickly and, just as important, to stop using old treatments earlier that were reckoned to be no good.

We had concerns on a number of things. Would NICE look just at new drugs, and not at old drugs? There were concerns that that would affect investment in research and patients' access to modern treatments. There has to be a balance between looking at old treatments, finding that those are not effective and releasing resources for their use, and looking at new treatments that the Government are interested in.

Would clinical effectiveness work just repeat what the licensing authorities had done based on phase-three clinical trials, which show whether a treatment works, or would some new measure of effectiveness—which the Government would not specify—have to be met? I fear that some of those concerns have proved to be correct.

The other concerns centred around cost-effectiveness. What measurements would NICE, at the Government's behest, use to measure cost-effectiveness? Clearly, relative cost-effectiveness of a new treatment as against an existing treatment for the same problem is reasonable. There is no way that the health service should pay for treatment A if it is more expensive, but no more effective than existing treatment B, so there is a clear role for NICE to issue some clear guidelines about relative cost-effectiveness.

Overall cost-effectiveness is much more difficult to get to grips with. It is harder to measure cost-effectiveness of treatments that are not curative. There is much debate about whether quality-adjusted life years are a fair way of measuring that, or in fact discriminate against the elderly, something that the Government should be concerned about, given this week's news about the prevalence of age discrimination in the NHS. There is concern about whether there is enough data in this country, or even in other countries where health economics are more advanced, to look at cost-effectiveness in very clear and explicit terms.

Another concern is that the Government would ask for data from the pharmaceutical industry on new drugs under new rules since the setting up of NICE, where the trials for licensing purposes of the drug had been started years ago and it was far too late for a pharmaceutical company to redesign its international trials to meet the demands.

Those were genuine concerns, which I hope the Minister accepts, but if they could be dealt with and were not too severe, people would say that the gain of ironing out unacceptable variation would be worth it. However, time and again, we have pressed the Government to say whether affordability would be a criterion on which NICE would judge matters. One would not imagine it from looking at the order setting up NICE, which was laid before Parliament in February 1999 and which we debated in Standing Committee following a call for such a debate by the Opposition. Article 3 says in terms of the functions of the institute:

"Subject to and in accordance with such directions as the Secretary of State may give (b), the Institute shall perform such functions in connection with the promotion of clinical excellence in the health service as the Secretary of State may direct."

There is no way I understand clinical excellence to relate to issues—important issues—of affordability. They are two different things. I think that it is argued uniformly in the NHS that affordability is a matter for the Government to decide. The Government set the budget. They make announcements saying that they are not spending this money on the health service, but spending it on something else, or that they are spending so much on the health service, even though it may be counted several times, as the Government tend to do.

Dr. Palmer: Before my intervention, I should mention that I advise Novartis; it could conceivably be relevant.

The hon. Gentleman appears to say that it is reasonable for NICE to compare the cost-effectiveness of one treatment against another to guide local health authorities, primary care groups and so on, but that NICE should not look at the cost-effectiveness of treatments if there is no comparable treatment. I do not quite see why he makes that prime distinction, especially as he admits that what he calls rationing—what I would call prioritisation—is inevitable in any health care system. I would have thought that primary care trusts and others would welcome guidance on that point.

Dr. Harris: There are two points there. The hon. Gentleman talks about prioritisation. That is a bit of a spin statement in itself because prioritisation implies "posteriorisation." No one ever talks of the procedures that we are going to posteriorise—that we are not going to fund when we fund specific treatments that we wish to prioritise. I think that he will accept that it is important that we recognise that the patients at the sharp end who get the posteriorised non-treatment do not see the prioritisation—they just see that the treatment is not available to them.

The point I am making is that it is difficult to look at cost-effectiveness when there is no existing treatment. For example, beta interferon is the only treatment that interferes with the disease process in multiple sclerosis and can, for certain patients, give benefits, so comparing that with something else is difficult. The cost of that is £10,000 per year, which is deemed to be too much by health authorities, yet the annual cost of dialysing a 30-year-old to keep that person alive is £30,000. On that basis, the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should divert all funds from dialysis, which is perhaps the most expensive treatment in terms of life years saved, to things that currently are not funded per life year saved and where the amount is lower; for example, Riluzole for motor neurone disease, or beta interferon for multiple sclerosis.

Some of the new taxane drugs for chemotherapy do not cure. The argument is about their indications in metastatic cancer, which is effectively incurable, and whether they should be first line. There is strong evidence—it is used overseas for the purpose—that first-line treatment with taxane can add years to life at a cost of about £10,000 per year. Again, that is not funded by some health authorities. The question is: if we ask health authorities all to fund it within the same cash envelope, what will they not fund? That choice has to be recognised.

If the things that the health authorities then do not fund are not acceptable to the electorate, the electorate might support a party that calls for higher funding, the things that are not funded being less unacceptable. If they think that, in the round, it is acceptable—that degree of rationing is the level that they want and they want their tax cuts—then we can have that argument. That is all that I call for.

That is not an issue on which the Government should hide behind NICE. They should start a debate on it. We have said on at least 15 occasions in debate that we will not oppose the Government if we have a public conference to debate those issues outside the party political arena, so that we can have a proper debate.

In July 1998, the Minister's predecessor, who is now the Secretary of State for Health, answered an oral question from me on the issue. He said in response to a supplementary question from the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard):

"we get lots of advice from economists and others who say that we need to bear down on the NHS drugs bill, as though drugs were a bad thing, which is a naive assumption. If drugs mean easier, better

and quicker treatment for the patient instead of going to hospital, that is a good thing and if it means growth in the NHS drugs bill, we should welcome it . . . we want a more rigorous assessment of what is cost effective and clinically effective, particularly when drugs come on to the market."—[*Official Report*, 28 July 1998; Vol. 317, c. 158.]

Those were all welcome comments, but there was no mention of affordability, particularly in all the talk about the cost of new drugs and the drugs bill—no mention that affordability would be an issue.

When Professor Michael Rawlins took on the job, he was clearly under the impression that he would not be asked to talk about the affordability of treatments. In answer to a question in the Select Committee on Health from the hon. Member for Preston (Audrey Wise), he said:

"Yes, but I am also conscious that NICE does not have a responsibility for the total allocation of financial resources with the National Health Service. NICE ultimately has to temper its advice in relationship to the people's elected representatives in Parliament and in Government."

It is clear that his view was that affordability is an issue for elected politicians. He says:

"Absolutely. I have no doubt at all that where NICE believes that a new technology or new guideline, even if it is expensive, has a real health gain it will be an advocate with the Department, like there has not been before, it will be robust, it will be given by clinicians and if necessary we will, as it were, bully the Department into seeing things our way.

It will be quite clear that we regard treatment: with Taxol"—

I think that that was being used as a hypothetical example—

"in ovarian cancer as clinically effective and the most clinically effective agent around."

Immediately, the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) asked Professor Sir Michael Rawlins to confirm that that was the separation in roles that he envisaged between the national institute and Ministers, and he replied "exactly". Liberal Democrat Members would like that separation to be maintained.

In Standing Committee, and during consideration of the Health Act 1999, the Minister made it quite clear that the national institute should not use an affordability criterion. On 6 August 1999, the Government issued a press release describing NICE's national programme, but made no mention of an affordability criterion. In the first note for editors, it states:

"The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) will give clinical guidance to the NHS in England and Wales including guidance on the clinical and cost effectiveness of new and existing clinical interventions. Proposals for NICE were first set out in the White Paper The New NHS: Modern and Dependable and further elaborated in a consultation paper A First Class service'".

In pages and pages, that press release mentions various treatments and the unacceptability of postcode prescribing, but it makes not one mention of affordability. That was peculiar.

On 6 August—the day that all that spin on NICE's programme was issued, and in the depths of the recess—an order was introduced, to insert in article 3, from which I quoted a moment ago, after the words "promotion of clinical excellence" the words

"and of the effective use of available resources".

That was a huge change. Liberal Democrat Members argue not only against that change in policy, but against the surreptitious way in which it was made. We also asked the Minister to appear before a Standing Committee to justify the change and the way in which it was made.

Subsequently, there has been some progress, with the national institute's first evaluation of a drug—the anti-flu drug Relenza. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the institute's first decision has confirmed all the fears expressed over many months by United Kingdom pharmaceutical companies that the national institute would effectively create a fourth, affordability hurdle for new medicines.

I do not want to deal with the details of the Relenza case—although I should be more than happy to do so if the Minister wishes to—but there were several problems with the decision. The first one is that the drug has been licensed and is effective in ameliorating the symptoms of flue and in shortening its course by, on average, one and a half days. I would like to have a drug that, for £24, would save me one and a half days off work because of flu, and think that, in principle, the health service should be prepared to buy such a drug. Moreover, the drug would probably be cost effective in work lost, even if there was no evidence that it saves lives.

NICE seems to be saying that, on the basis of affordability, it and the health service would not be interested in flu as a disease until there was a drug that is proved to save lives among the elderly. However, that is a separate issue.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Does the hon. Gentleman think that a £5 flu vaccination is more cost effective than a £24 five-day course of Relenza?

Dr. Harris: I know that we cannot have a direct exchange now, but I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman knows the effectiveness of the flu vaccination—is it 100 per cent? It is 30 per cent. Therefore, even with universal flu vaccination—currently, only risk groups are receiving it—effectiveness would be only 30 per cent. Other treatments, such as Amantadine, are available in the NHS for some strains of flu. Therefore, a new principle has not been established that the NHS is not interested in flu.

When we talk about rationing NHS treatments, or the unavailability of treatments on the NHS, we are not saying that no one in the United Kingdom will receive those treatments, but that the treatments will not be available to poor people. The rich and others who can afford the treatments will be able to receive Viagra, Relenza and other treatments, such as new chemotherapy, that are not available from health authorities.

Yesterday, the *Daily Mail* made it clear that some doctors—including some oncologists to whom I have spoken—tell their wealthier patients that they cannot provide the drug on the NHS, but that they would prescribe it if they visited as a private patient. Doctors are not funded to provide some of the new chemotherapeutic agents to everyone. I think that that is immoral, and that the Government have to recognise that NHS rationing entails depriving treatments to poor people.

Dr. Ladyman: NICE's judgment on Relenza was only an interim one, based on current evidence, and was based not on the treatment's cost, but on the difficulty of ensuring that patients present at the right time to ensure that the treatment is effective. Other than Glaxo,

Relenza's manufacturer, pharmaceutical companies—at least the ones that I have spoken to—think that NICE got the decision right.

Dr. Harris: I have not heard that view expressed before by the industry, but shall deal with that later.

Other treatments may be affected by the affordability criterion, but are seen by Ministers and Labour Members as more desirable—and less as low-hanging fruit—than flu treatments. If NICE said that, on the basis of affordability, beta interferon should not be prescribed or that taxanes should not be used as a first-line treatment, I would bet that Labour Members would find it much more difficult to dismiss Relenza as simply a flu treatment and to insist on vaccination.

In "Faster Access to Modern Treatment", we were promised transitional arrangements for companies. The paper stated:

"Transitional arrangements will be needed over the next few years, in particular for medicines, since any clinical research needed to satisfy the licensing requirements will already be underway. Under these circumstances it would be unreasonable to require information which was not obtainable from the research already underway, since that would imply new research and might delay, perhaps by several years, the launch of the product. We believe that this would be unrealistic for many companies, especially those with international markets."

It would be incredibly unfair if a company spent up to 12 years on developing a drug—including years in clinical trials, to reach phase 3—but the Government subsequently said, "You should have got this data on cost effectiveness". The transitional arrangements were therefore crucial. However, those arrangements were ignored in the Relenza decision—they were not heeded.

A drug that has been judged to be clinically effective should be innocent until proven guilty. Particularly in the transitional phase, drug companies—which invest hugely in the United Kingdom—should be treated fairly and should not be asked, after the fact, to provide cost-effectiveness data.

I think that Ministers will find that a consequence of decisions based on affordability—such as the one on Relenza, but also future ones—is that products are not launched first in Britain. Britain is an important market, and other countries watch to see what we do. There has been grave concern in the pharmaceutical industry that decisions made by the national institute will be emulated by other countries.

Drugs may also not be launched early in Britain. Therefore, British patients may have slower, rather than faster access to modern treatment. It is well recognised that, in NHS clinical trials, some data even on clinical effectiveness, but especially on cost effectiveness, are extremely difficult to obtain and may be obtained only after the drug is in use in the NHS. The Government have to allow drugs to be used in the NHS. If they do not allow them to be used on the basis of affordability, Ministers should clearly say that and not seek to hide behind NICE.

I fear that clinical trials will not be performed in the United Kingdom, as companies will not plan an early launch here for the treatments. Currently, many new treatments in my health authority are being provided cheaply in ethical clinical trials.

The Government have to recognise that sneaking in the affordability criterion, not applying the transitional arrangements, and giving responsibility for affordability decisions to a non-elected body will damage not only investment by the pharmaceutical industry in the United Kingdom, but NHS patients' access to modern treatments. When we talk about the access of NHS patients, in these senses we are often talking about elderly and poor patients. That policy undermines everything that the Government say about the need to tackle health inequality.

11.30 am

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing it. I have the utmost respect for the hon. Gentleman and must confess that we have spent many a night together. Before the media start to ring my wife, I hasten to add that that was during the long debates in the Standing Committee that considered the Health Bill.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State and the ministerial team for making the National Institute for Clinical Excellence a reality. No more of the rhetoric or excuses for unfair treatment, no more the spiral of decline of our much-loved national health service, and no more one patient receiving a treatment and another being declined—in short, no more Tory Government.

Instead, we have a national institute that provides access to a single source of quality information for health professionals. It assists them to make complex decisions about patient care and ends the current state of confusion over treatment. Among other things, NICE's programme of work includes beta interferon for multiple sclerosis, taxanes for ovarian and breast cancer and inhalers for childhood asthma. Patients will receive greater consistency in the availability and quality of NHS services. NICE guidance covers all aspects of management of a condition, from self-care to care by the family doctor, the hospital and specialist services.

First, on the constant and rather sad argument that comes from the Tories and Liberal Democrats, who mention the "R" word rationing. In spite of what the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon said, they try to paint a picture of people holding ration books, counting their coupons, terrified of not being treated when those run out. They fear they will be told, "Sorry, Madam, we can't prescribe any more painkillers because you've exceeded your quota. Come back next year when your ration starts again", or, "No, Sir, we can't admit you. You've already been here twice this year. I'm afraid your ration is two visits a year." The picture painted by the Opposition would be patently daft, except that it is blatant scaremongering, which frightens people, especially the elderly.

The NHS has always set priorities for treatment and worked within cash limits. The difference between this Government and previous Tory Governments is that Labour is investing £21 billion more over three years in the NHS. Just as importantly, it believes in the concept of the national health service, unlike the Tories.

NICE helps the health professionals to make judgments on treatments with thoroughly researched information—informed judgments instead of the patchwork quilt of best guesses of the previous Tory Government. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond),

[Mr. Paul Marsden]

who is not present—I note the acres of green space on the Tory Benches today—said on 14 June:

"For the record, there was rationing within the NHS during the period of the previous Conservative Government. We do not deny it, and have not sought to deny it."—[*Official Report*, 14 June 1999; Vol. 333, c. 88.]

There we have it, the Tories are proud of their policy of denying treatment to patients through the chronic underfunding and unfairness of the internal market.

We must put an end to the situation in which one health authority supports a treatment, but another does not because then the question of who is right and who is wrong arises. NICE is about rational thinking, not rationing treatment.

As usual, the Liberal Democrats struggle to find a single consistent argument. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon said in 1998:

"It is difficult to see how we can secure the new evidence . . . for the National Institute of Clinical Excellence".—[*Official Report*, 9 July 1998; Vol. 315, c. 1315.]

I took that to mean that there was no need for NICE. However, on 10 March this year, he said:

"NICE is necessary to iron out inequalities in health—I accept the Government's thinking on that".

That was only column 10. By column 12, he said that he could give only,

"half a cheer for the establishment of NICE".—[*Official Report, Third Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation*, 10 March 1999; c. 10-12.]

Up and down, round and round—that is the Liberal Democrat policy. However, it is not the Tory's policy. They are clear cut—no ambiguity, no praise for the national institute. Speaking for the Tories, the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge said on 10 March:

"This NICE will be nasty"—[*Official Report, Third Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation*, 10 March 1999; c. 3.]—

a nice sound bite.

Tory solutions lie in the private sector. They want to run down the national health service and force more and more people to take out private health insurance. That is rationing health care. Those who can afford private insurance get a limited health care, those who cannot have to watch a Tory NHS being reduced to ruins.

Perhaps the Tories would like this country to introduce a similar health care system to that in Germany. German workers have to sign up to an insurance company. Each worker pays 6.5 per cent. of gross pay and the employer has to match that. How about the Belgian system of patients paying up to 25 per cent. of the cost of their treatment? I am sure that the British people and British businesses would be interested in the Tory pledge to inflict a new health tax rise on the nation.

Private health care has an important role to play for some people who can afford it, but it cannot deliver the depth and quality of care that the NHS and all its staff deliver every day. NICE is an important step forward. It has been welcomed by 37 community health councils and by royal colleges. Together with other initiatives such as the modernisation programme for accident and emergency departments, NHS Direct and the largest hospital building programme in history, this Government are delivering a modern health care system for the 21st century. I asked for local views in my constituency. The Royal Shrewsbury hospital said:

"NICE will promote clinical and cost effectiveness through guidance and audit, to support our frontline staff."

Shrewsbury health authority said of NICE that it welcomed

"its establishment and look forward to the role it will play. The NHS has long needed such an organisation which is able to evaluate current and new treatments including drugs . . . It will certainly prove extremely valuable to Shropshire . . . and is warmly welcomed by the Authority."

Australia, Finland and the Netherlands have set up similar organisations. It seems that only Tory politicians claim to know better than clinicians which treatments are best.

The Government and the Secretary of State for Health are committed to improving cancer care with their pledge to cut deaths among those under 75 by one fifth at least in the next 10 years. NICE is appraising taxanes for ovarian and breast cancer and I understand that it will provide definitive advice next year on their clinical and cost effectiveness. Taxanes, including Taxotere, are important treatments in cancer care. I hope that NICE will support their use—even Greece uses more Taxotere treatments than this country—but that is my opinion. That is the important point. We need expert, trusted advice from NICE. In general, we need more cancer drugs with proven track records. It is up to NICE to recommend which drugs are cost effective and clinically effective.

In summary, I support the national institute wholeheartedly. It will raise the quality of care in the NHS. It empowers clinicians and commissioners to make informed decisions on best advice. Patients will receive greater consistency in the availability and quality of NHS services. The Liberal Democrats offer half a cheer and the Tories offer health care in chaos. It is this Labour Government, through NICE's advice and by investing in staff, technology and new treatments, who are to deliver the quality health care that we need in the NHS for the 21st century.

11.39 am

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing this important debate. I declare my interests, as set out in the register, particularly with Wyeth, the firm involved in the meningitis C vaccine campaign.

NICE's recent announcement on Relenza will have greater long-term implications for science in the NHS and for the pharmaceutical industry than the Government may yet realise. I have no financial relationship with Glaxo Wellcome, but I am indebted to Sir Richard Sykes because five years ago we launched a campaign to win for Britain the European Medicines Evaluation Agency. This is not the time to set out why our pharmaceutical industry is such a leader among the creative industries. We are low prescribers per head, and overwhelmingly the industry invests in research in Britain and uses this country as a springboard for exports. It would be dangerous to put the long-standing partnership between the industry and the NHS in jeopardy.

When we launched the campaign for the European Medicines Evaluation Agency, it was to be a magnet for inward investment. Britain was advanced as a location for

the agency because of our record for integrity and probity and our commanding position in pharmaceutical research, with four out of the top 10 medicines prescribed having been discovered in the UK.

Above all, our drug regulation agency, the Medicines Control Agency, deals with more drug applications more quickly than any other European licensing agency. A Department of Health press release of 29 October 1993 said:

"London offers precisely the right conditions for the Agency: the UK's record for probity, integrity and swiftness in medicines regulation is second to none. The EMEA will be crucial to the development of safe and innovatory medicines for all EC citizens."

That success was followed by a major campaign entitled "Prescribe UK", which involved the pharmaceutical industries, led by Sir Richard Sykes, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Invest in Britain Bureau. It was an attempt to encourage more Japanese, American and other pharmaceutical companies to invest in Britain. The Government declare themselves to be champions of the pharmaceutical industry and to want to promote inward investment. It is a shame that there is no representative here today from the Department of Trade and Industry or the other Departments which, in the age of so-called joined-up government, should be watching the situation carefully.

If a product has been licensed by the Medicines Control Agency or the EMEA, it has been approved for safety, quality and efficacy. The message that has gone to the industry from the announcements on Relenza is that there is a mysterious new delaying tactic that will prevent new products from reaching the market. The industry has just faced a 4.5 per cent. price cut and is often sceptical about the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme. I support the PPRS, with all its difficulties. However, the Minister should be aware of what is being said in the industry, particularly by those from overseas, about the new, unaccountable way of delaying new products reaching the market.

I was prompted to speak today partly by the concern expressed by the industry and the real danger of the withdrawal of inward investment. I know, for example, what major pharmaceutical inward investment means to people in Thanet, in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom. It is essential that the Government understand the message that is being taken from the announcement on Relenza. However, the main factor that has prompted me to speak is the growing concern in the scientific community, particularly among those whom I most respected when I was Secretary of State for Health. They have no political partisan commitment. They work in the health service because they are fascinated by medical research and they argue that the contribution of the industry to science in the NHS has been formidable.

The Government do not have a proud track record. The first thing that they did in their first year was cut the NHS research budget. Research is all too easily too low a priority. My concern is that the implications of what has been happening at NICE may threaten not only a successful industry but, even more important, the nature of research in the NHS.

It is fashionable for politicians on both sides to condemn postcode prescribing. It was an attempt to allow different health authorities to set their own priorities and make different decisions. That allows diversity, which, when different areas are compared, becomes a springboard for innovation. It is hard to explain and to justify, but the effect was to create diversity. It is as old as the NHS.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I apologise to my right hon. Friend for not necessarily agreeing with what she says about postcode prescribing. I was not here earlier in the debate, but I know that we have talked about beta interferon. Does she agree that the situation is a terrible tragedy for constituents such as mine, who could be prescribed beta interferon if they lived in Bath or Oxford, but not in Wiltshire?

Mrs. Bottomley: All Members of Parliament have been affected by the campaign on beta interferon, and sufferers of multiple sclerosis feel understandably anxious and alarmed about the availability of new products and the best products for their condition.

The problem is that NICE is seeking to make premature decisions. It is well established that many new technologies or drugs end up being used for conditions and in circumstances that were not previously anticipated. The danger is that NICE will clamp down on innovation too soon.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) made clear, there is mounting anxiety that new products are not being made available. We have first-class people working in a second-class service. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) spoke euphorically about changes in the health service. I ask him to come to west Surrey, which has not had a ministerial visit in two and a half years. The news is very bad, and there has never been a time of greater despair and concern about the ability to provide treatment and care for a range of patient needs.

My concern is to promote evidence-based medicine. I support the concept of NICE. I share the concern of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon that forcing the issue of cost-effectiveness and affordability onto NICE at the last minute, in a way that the distinguished Professor Michael Rawlins initially denied, will give the institute a task that will make it increasingly incredible. I ask the Minister to meet leaders in medical research in the NHS in an open-minded way and to talk more widely with people in the industry before a good idea turns out to be deplorably destructive to medical research, to science and to an extremely successful British industry.

11.49 am

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I seldom congratulate the previous Government on anything, but, picking up on the comments of the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley), I congratulate them on her successful campaign to win the European Medicines Evaluation Agency for the United Kingdom. In many ways, the agency was given to the United Kingdom as a second prize, because we did not get the European Bank. In the long term, it may well turn out to be the first prize and will probably make more money for the United Kingdom, one way or another, than the European Bank would have done. To that extent, I agree with the right hon. Lady.

However, when the right hon. Lady talks about prescribing guidelines and the way in which the NHS decides which drugs to buy, she forgets that the NHS is

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

not the Government or the marketplace—it is only a purchaser. In the United States, where there is a private marketplace, the equivalent to the NHS is the health management organisation with which one's insurer happens to be tied up. The United States may not have a National Institute for Clinical Excellence, but I bet my life that each health management organisation has an internal group that makes decisions about prescribing guidelines and drug purchase. For it, cost and cost-effectiveness are not tangential but direct matters. It must decide whether the health management organisation will prescribe a particular drug in a particular way.

The health service must have something equivalent to that and, in setting up NICE, the Government have taken a logical step which they are perfectly entitled to take. With some refinements and improvements it will have nothing like the impact on the United Kingdom's pharmaceutical industry that the right hon. Lady fears.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing this debate. I agree with a number of points that he made, but I cannot let his speech go without noting once again, as I did in my intervention, that the Liberal Democrats' manifesto contains not a word about medicines. I have read it thoroughly, and if the hon. Gentleman has forgotten what is in it I shall gladly give him my copy. It contains not one extra penny for the drugs budget.

The hon. Gentleman says that prescription charges are not ring-fenced for the drugs budget, and he is right. They were in the supplementary costings document that went with the Liberal Democrat manifesto. Of the £570 million extra for the NHS this year identified in that manifesto, £200 million was to go to the Treasury to freeze the cost of prescription charges, and only £370 million was additional money for the NHS and was identified for hospitals, an additional carers allowance and dentistry. There was not a penny extra for drugs. Had the hon. Gentleman been the Minister replying to today's debate, he would have been trying to justify a Liberal Democratic Government's plans for limiting the availability of drugs on a smaller budget than the Government have currently made available. Liberal Democrats need to be a little more honest about that.

There is a serious debate. Liberal Democrats talk about rationing and the Government talk about prioritising. Like the line in the song,

"I say tomato, you say 'tamater'",

it is a matter of semantics, which I do not want to get into. What the Government have done, and on which they should be congratulated, is to pool the community health service moneys, the hospital expenditure moneys and the drugs budget moneys, making them available to the health authorities in their entirety so that health authorities can prioritise locally as they wish. Such local prioritising must be right. However, that has probably highlighted the differences in prescribing guidelines throughout Britain.

In an Adjournment debate on 13 April, I highlighted the cases of two constituents who were not at that time receiving beta interferon—Ms Lesley Jordan and Mrs. Noreen Heffer. The first of those two ladies is now receiving beta interferon, but the second still is not, and I continue to campaign for her to receive it as soon as possible. But in east Kent the amount of money allocated to beta interferon is much greater than in equivalent sized health authorities elsewhere, yet we have a long waiting list.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) said that in some areas there is not a waiting list, but that is because the prescribing guidelines there are different. The money might be available and there might be no waiting list, but a person might not be put on the waiting list because the doctors there might not consider that beta interferon was a suitable treatment. On that basis, creating NICE must be right. It is the right organisation with the right task, and its guidelines will be invaluable in solving such problems.

I said earlier that NICE requires some refinements. One thing that NICE has not publicly said that it will do, but which I hope that it will, is to look at the regulatory process and advise the Government and the EU on how it is working. Hon. Members may not realise it, but in America the Food and Drug Administration takes raw data from pharmaceutical companies and carries out its own expert analysis. In the United Kingdom, the pharmaceutical companies analyse the data and produce their own expert reports on efficacy, toxicology and so on. Our drugs agencies assess those expert reports to see whether the analysis is correct and whether the appropriate conclusions have been drawn. It is a different process.

NICE should be looking at that process and asking whether there is a point at which it should intervene or enter into negotiations with the pharmaceutical companies at an earlier stage in order to influence what goes into the expert efficacy report so that decisions can be made more effectively and rapidly once licensing approval has been given. Could NICE perhaps write an additional expert report, requesting the raw data in order rapidly to produce such a report? Discussions between NICE and the pharmaceutical industry could resolve many of the problems that have been highlighted today, and I encourage NICE to continue with such discussions.

At the end of the day, however, even with common prescribing guidelines across the country—here I am on common ground with the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon—there will still be pressures on the budget. We cannot fund everything. Therefore, decisions have to be made about what will not be spent. I have said publicly on many occasions, not least in the Adjournment debate on 13 April, that we can make those decisions relatively easily because, within the drugs budget, there is a huge amount of money that does not need to be spent.

A list of products for non-life-threatening illnesses includes dermatological products, anti-ulcerants, laxatives and topical non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. Such illnesses might be uncomfortable, but they are not debilitating, disabling or life-threatening, and spending on them amounts to £1.075 billion. Even if 50 per cent. of that spending was for uncomfortable illnesses that we decided to fund, if one added to the list medicines such as antibiotics, which doctors prescribe for colds, despite knowing that it will make no difference whatever, at least £500 million of spending on medicines in Britain at the moment could be cut tomorrow without seriously affecting anyone. We would then have our cancer drugs and our beta interferon, and all the problems that we want to be resolved would be resolved, at least in the short term. That is where we need to be putting in extra effort.

To help us make such decisions, NHS legislation should define exactly what we wish to treat. The 1945 NHS White Paper which preceded the 1948 legislation declared that, irrespective of means, age, [illegible] or occupation, everyone shall have equal opportunity to benefit from the best and most up-to-date medical and allied services available. The 1977 legislation referred to a comprehensive health service designed to secure improvement in the physical and mental health of people in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness. We should be moving towards adding a definition of the services provided by the NHS, which specifies that the health service will treat without charge, irrespective of income, all those who suffer from life-threatening, disabling or debilitating illnesses.

Mrs. Bottomley: Essentially, the hon. Gentleman has just defined rationing. That is what the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon has been saying.

Dr. Ladyman: I have not defined rationing—I have defined prioritising. I said that, on this matter, I am on common ground with the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon. There are things that the NHS currently funds which it should not be funding. If NICE can help us to resolve that problem, it will have performed a great benefit, and the hon. Gentleman will have to congratulate it.

Dr. Harris: May I dissociate myself from your proposal not to fund certain treatments that you think—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must use the correct parliamentary language.

Dr. Harris: May I dissociate myself from the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that certain treatments should not be funded because he feels that the conditions are not debilitating? That puts a whole new complexion on the seriousness of some skin diseases.

Dr. Ladyman: I made it clear that I was referring to non-serious uses of drugs. I said that even if we eliminated half of the budget, we would save £500 million. I accept that there are many uncomfortable and serious skin conditions which need treatment. However, if the hon. Gentleman can sit tell me with his hand on his heart that, as a GP, he never wasted a penny of his drugs budget or gave antibiotics to someone with a sore throat or a cold, I will congratulate him on being the only GP of his kind.

I congratulate the Government on setting up NICE which, with a little more refinement, will have a beneficial effect on the NHS and the pharmaceutical industry in this country.

12.1 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing a debate that he has been seeking for some time. The debate has demonstrated the importance of the issue, and more time is needed to allow more hon. Members to have a say.

The crux of the debate is whether NICE is to be a vehicle to enable the Government to pass off their responsibility for decisions on prioritising or rationing health care, or whether it is to be a vehicle for making decisions about the efficacy and clinical effectiveness of various treatments. Until the agency starts its work seriously and we see the product of its labours, the jury is out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon is right to draw attention to the order introduced in this House on 6 August, which made it clear that the question of affordability will be at the heart of NICE's work. In Committee in May, we pressed the Government on whether they would use their powers of direction and their order-making powers in this respect. We were left with the impression that they would not go down that path on affordability.

I hope that the Minister will state that when NICE comes to a crunch decision about the availability of a particular treatment or drug—and if it comes down to resource availability—the decision and the announcement will come from the Minister, and that the Minister will be seen clearly in this House and outside as the person who has taken that decision. It must not be a matter that the Minister can distance himself from, using NICE as a shield behind which he, the Department and his colleagues can hide.

The independence of NICE is crucial to its effectiveness. It is crucial also to its standing and to whether clinicians will comply with its guidance. If clinicians do not believe that NICE is acting independently, how can we expect them to respect and follow what it says? It is essential that Ministers make it clear from the outset that they are not intending to use NICE as a vehicle to deny a range of treatments on grounds of affordability.

In August, the Department set out, in terms, that beta interferon

"is a controversial treatment for a patient group with poor prognosis. Many clinicians continue to have doubts over the cost-effectiveness of this treatment".

However, there was no balance in the Department's comments. There was no reflection of the fact that the Association of British Neurologists had issued guidance which suggested that the efficacy of the drug was sound. It makes no reference to the extensive research, published in *The Lancet* and elsewhere, which demonstrates that, particularly in terms of the relapsing and remitting forms—and the secondary progressive forms—of multiple sclerosis, the evidence is becoming overwhelming in terms of the drug's efficacy. The evidence from such a survey suggested that there was a "highly statistically significant benefit". I hope that the Minister will say more about that today.

There is much ambiguity about the definition of clinical and cost-effectiveness. There is no clear definition. Could the Minister begin to put one on the record so we all know where we stand? On savings, we are unclear as to whether the Government will allow NICE to look at the wider picture of the costs to UK plc.

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

In a letter that I received a few days ago, in response to correspondence that I initiated with the Department in March, I was told:

"In relation to clinical and cost effectiveness, NICE's task is to assess the evidence of all the clinical and other health-related benefits of an intervention in a wide sense, and to reach a judgment on whether on balance this intervention can be recommended as a cost-effective use of NHS and Personal Social Services resources."

That was music to my ears, and a step in the right direction. I hope that the Minister will confirm that social services and social security resources, and the cost to the economy as a whole, can be taken into account by NICE.

My constituent, Mrs. Josephine Timms—I raised her case with the Minister in March—is still waiting for beta interferon treatment. She is still being told that she is a perfect candidate, and that there is no waiting list. However, she is waiting, and I am waiting for an answer from the Minister. What is being done to ensure that Mrs. Timms gets the treatment she deserves?

In conclusion, many patients groups are concerned about NICE. The Multiple Sclerosis Society has said:

"Both the statutory instrument on NICE tabled in August and the Institute's appraisal framework give a worrying indication that the Government may allow information about NHS resources to distort the Institute's conclusions about clinical and cost effectiveness.

Decisions about the effectiveness of a treatment should be entirely separate from the consideration of whether funds exist to pay for it. NICE should decide whether a drug is effective and good value for money compared with other forms of care available to patients. The Secretary of State should then decide whether the NHS can fund the treatment."

I agree with that—it is a sound basis to go forward. NICE does not appear to be allowed to do that as of now. Can the Minister confirm that it will be allowed to do that?

12.8 pm

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): According to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), the Liberal Democrats' view of NICE seems to be that it is primarily a device for limiting access to health care. I want to argue that the opposite is the case. It is a mechanism for ensuring that the maximum number of people have access to the most effective health care.

I wish to allude to the issue of postcode rationing, which is, essentially, an aspect of the inequity of access to health care. The greatest cause of inequity of access to health care is not at the level of hospital services—it is a public health debate. If one is poor, lives in poor housing and experiences air pollution, one is likely to have much poorer health than someone rich who lives in decent housing and clean air. The Government's White Paper on public health will address that agenda and will make the most difference to health inequalities in this country.

The second contributor to health inequality is the variation in the quality of treatment that individuals receive for the same condition, depending on their GP and local hospital. That variation has nothing to do with drugs budgets or the limitation on the drugs being prescribed. It will be addressed partly by NICE and partly by the Commission for Health Improvement, which will make a huge contribution to reducing health inequalities.

So-called postcode rationing is only the third contributor to health inequalities. The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) alluded to the contradiction in opposing different health authorities having different spending priorities if we believe that the role of a health authority is to react to the needs of its region. Either we want to get rid of that and have national uniformity, with decisions taken nationally that do not take account of regional variation, or we have to stop talking about postcode rationing necessarily being evil. In a given area, it may be right that greater priority is given to one service rather than another, while a different decision is taken in another area.

I shall explain how NICE will increase access for the maximum number of people to effective health care. For many conditions, a large range of potential treatments is available and new treatments continuously emerge. It is difficult for doctors in the health service, whether general practitioners or hospital doctors, to keep abreast of all the research and all the evaluation of existing treatments.

The doctors whom I know tend to stick to what they know works, or are rabid innovators and try the latest idea without necessarily being aware of the full evaluation or the basis of the treatment. There has been much talk about pharmaceuticals, but NICE also evaluates treatment protocols and other procedures. For example, hip replacement operations are fairly low technology and very important to the individuals who receive them. They give enormous pain relief and improve hugely the quality of life of the people who need them. About 40,000 are done a year. I understand that, on average, the procedure costs £4,000. Some 60 different implants are available to NHS doctors, their cost varying from £200 to £2,000. A recent study showed that, in terms of benefit to patients, there is almost no difference between the most and least expensive implants. If all doctors used that advice and went for the cheapest implant, there would be no diminution of the quality of service given to patients but many more operations could be done and more patients would receive a hip replacement sooner.

That is an excellent example of the way in which NICE will be able to get such information quickly and easily to those in the health service who need to take such decisions and ensure that the best possible use is made of public resources. NICE will effectively provide a single source of advice on the evaluation of existing treatments and the best guidelines and protocols to be used in various clinical circumstances. That will help to drive up quality in the NHS.

For example, protocols are drawn up on the criteria for out-patient referrals. One of the commitments that the Government have rightly made is that women who are believed to be exhibiting the symptoms of breast cancer will be referred to a consultant within two weeks. It is important that GPs have a clear protocol for deciding when patients present to them what indicates that the patient is at likely risk of breast cancer and the signs that mean that they are highly likely to have breast cancer but may have some other breast condition that needs to be seen by a consultant but not within two weeks. It is important that the protocols are clear and that GPs stick to them or it will be impossible to meet the Government's targets because consultants will get clogged up with referrals that need attention but not within two weeks.

There are similar issues in respect of the protocols drawn up and disseminated on the appropriate use of drug regimes in treating cancer patients. It is not simply a question of having unlimited budgets so that the most expensive drugs can be used, but of the correct drug regime being designed for the individual patient.

The other way in which NICE will help ensure that people get the most effective treatment is that it will help avoid unnecessary treatment. I want to consider glue ear, which hon. Members will remember occasioned a heated debate in the general election before last. I have had direct experience of it through my daughters. In many cases, the condition resolves itself, and operations have a pretty limited efficacy. Most protocols on glue ear suggest that it is best when the child first presents for the GP to wait before referring the child to hospital to avoid the risk of a child having to undergo a general anaesthetic. In talking about the efficacy of drug treatments, we must remember that every drug and clinical procedure has a risk attached. It is important that people are aware of that and are not exposed to treatment that is unnecessary or that has only a low probability of bringing an improvement.

It is now widely understood in the pharmaceutical industry and the health service that not all drugs are equally effective on all patients. There is enormous hope that improved knowledge of genomics and human genetics will enable doctors to identify from people's genetic make-up which drugs will be most effective for the individual patient in an individual condition, thereby much more effectively targeting the drug on those patients who would benefit and ensuring that the money is spent in the most effective way.

With several drugs, including beta interferon and proton pump inhibitors, it is already clear that only a relatively small proportion of patients with a given condition will necessarily benefit from them. Again, NICE will be able to ensure that all doctors are aware of such information and constantly updated on how to identify the patients who will most benefit from the drugs. That will avoid the more expensive drugs being sprayed around on all the patients who might benefit, and allow targeting on those who will benefit.

I strongly believe that NICE has the capacity hugely to improve the quality of health care, reduce regional variations and allow effective use of resources. I hope that all parties will recognise that that is its main object and will support that.

Finally, I want to consider the pharmaceutical industry, which was mentioned by the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey, and relate it to what I said about the importance of genomics and the future of health care. Many different factors contribute to making this country a good environment for the pharmaceutical industry to operate in. One that we are not properly exploiting is the fact that the existence of the NHS and the primary care network means that we have a fantastic database of patient information that would be incredibly useful in informing the sort of research that pharmaceutical companies need to do to link drug development to human genetics. If we find a way that continues to protect patient confidentiality but can make those records available for use in such research, it will do much to ensure that we continue to provide an environment in which the pharmaceutical industry can operate for the benefit of the industry but also for the benefit of the quality of our health care.

12.19 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): The quality of many of the speeches in this debate on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence was wholly consistent with the quality of debate that we have come to expect on Wednesday mornings. We hope that debates of such quality will continue in the new surroundings.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing the debate which, at times, almost raised the blood pressure. The subject needs to be debated in Parliament openly and honestly. We think that there is no dispute that rationing occurs in the national health service. There were moments during the debate when I got quite excited, particularly during the contribution of the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) who made perhaps the first such effort. He spoke of the money wasted through the unnecessary prescribing of drugs. That is a topical issue: primary care groups have overspent to the tune of the half a billion pounds that the hon. Gentleman says could be saved. Perhaps there is room for debate on that subject.

Our real purpose this morning is to focus on the role of NICE. I have read carefully the Standing Committee reports on the Health Bill, and the goalposts appear to have been moved since then. On several occasions in Committee, Opposition amendments sought to tease out whether NICE would use affordability as a criterion. The Government response on a number of occasions was that that would not be the case. Yet, as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon pointed out, an order was laid before Parliament on 6 August which explicitly changed the constitution of NICE, amending it to take into account the effective use of available resources. That criterion would justify the Opposition's concerns that the institute would be brought in to shield the Government from the very difficult decisions that have to be taken, given that the Government have finite resources at their disposal with which to treat the health of the nation. The institute's original aims—to promote faster access and more effective treatments—might well have to compete with the extra constraint of affordability.

I endorse the concerns expressed by various hon. Members about how such cost-effectiveness will be defined. A definition will be important for all those working in the health service and the research organisations that help it do its job better. Cost-effectiveness will be particularly difficult to determine where new medicines are concerned, as it involves comparison or relativity between treatments, and a new medicine or treatment may have nothing with which to be compared. We look forward to hearing the Minister of State's definition. I endorse the view that it should be wide enough to take account of savings in other Departments. Surely that is consistent with joined-up government. I hope that the Minister will provide confirmation.

One of my greatest concerns about the Government introducing the new criterion will be in the treatment of chronic conditions. Savings could be made if treatments for chronic conditions allowed patients to stay in work longer or reduced their need for social care. That may not always be the case, and it should never be a condition of treatment on the NHS that a treatment can necessarily demonstrate a concomitant economic benefit. That has to be wrong for a publicly provided health service.

[Mrs. Caroline Spelman]

If we assume that a financial cost will be incurred from caring for patients with chronic conditions, we must ensure that they enjoy the best possible quality of life. The Minister of State said on 10 March that NICE would look at priority setting, but we believe that that must remain a decision for the Government who can be held to account by Parliament. Making NICE responsible for such decisions would undermine its credibility and make its implementation by the clinicians extremely difficult.

12.25 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on obtaining this debate. If he is right that this is the last debate of one and a half hours that will take place in the Chamber on a Wednesday morning, I am glad that it has been spent discussing something so critical to the Government's programme for modernising the national health service.

Inevitably, I will not be able to answer all the points that have been raised in this debate. It has been extremely constructive and well informed which, as the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said, is so often the case with Wednesday morning debates. However, I shall pick up a few of the major issues and, if the Liberal Democrats pursue their prayer, we may be discussing them in more detail in Committee.

I think that I should welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon now feels that he needs to spend about five minutes distancing himself from the official Opposition before he uses the word "rationing". I think that he has begun to understand—although it was not much in evidence this morning—that the official Opposition's loose throwing around of that term in recent months has more to do with attempts to undermine public confidence in the national health service and to promote a private alternative than with the way in which the health service sets priorities. As we have always acknowledged, any system that does not have infinite resources has to set priorities. I realise that that is almost a meaningless statement. It is my belief that the national health service and the principles on which it is based provide us with the fairest, most equitable and efficient way of taking the necessary decisions. It is certainly better than the options that are promoted. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's shift in position.

We have made it clear that we want to tackle what we see as the unacceptable variations in the quality of, and access to, treatment and care in different parts of the country. The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) suggested that those variations were a good part of the system—she referred to it as diversity. I do not agree. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon said that it was all to do with funding. I do not agree. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) made clear, differences in the provision and quality of care and treatment arise from different approaches to the same decision based on different interpretations of the evidence, different approaches to best clinical practice, slower spread of the best treatment and slower spread of the best ways to approach different issues.

Several strands in the Government's programme have come together to tackle the unacceptable variations in quality of care and treatment. That is one of the reasons that we are introducing clinical governance; it is one of the reasons that we have set out a programme of national health service frameworks; and it is one of the reasons that we are establishing the Commission for Health Improvement.

NICE will provide guidance on the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of treatments and protocols. We are implementing all the elements of that important agenda in the national health service, and I think that they will enable us to tackle unacceptable variations in treatment and care. As my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) said, the approach has been widely welcomed across the health service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) reinforced the point. She said that for general practitioners to keep up with all the new research evidence currently produced, they would need to read about 17 scientific papers each day, 365 days a year. That is not realistic. NICE will provide a single source of authoritative guidance and advice on clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness that is necessary to inform health professionals' decisions. It will not override decisions made by clinicians with their patients in the consulting room.

If Ministers decide that something needs to be banned entirely from the national health service, there are procedures to do so. In pre-NICE days, that happened with Viagra, and the decision was properly debated in the House. The truth is that, overwhelmingly, health professionals—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

Cleveland Police

12.30 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce a brief debate on a serious issue that is causing great concern to many of my constituents and the people of Teesside as a whole: Operation Lancet.

Operation Lancet is an inquiry overseen by the Police Complaints Authority into alleged malpractice and corruption in Cleveland police. My speech reflects the results of tabling many parliamentary questions over the past eight months and detailed investigative journalism on the part of local newspaper reporters who are also appalled by the way in which the inquiry has descended into farce. In my speech, I shall give the background to the inquiry and set out the lessons we should learn. I shall also make some suggestions regarding changes and improvements to the procedures and policies governing such inquiries. In addition, I shall issue a call for action to complete the Lancet process by imposing a time limit on its work.

The inquiry is wide ranging: so far, 560 disciplinary notices have been issued to a total of 60 officers, informing them that they are under investigation. The inquiry has been running for more than two years and has cost the council tax payers of Cleveland almost £2.5 million. Eight Cleveland detectives have been suspended, including Detective Superintendent Ray Mallon, the man whose zero tolerance approach to policing led to Cleveland police achieving a greater reduction in crime than any other force in 1997.

In December 1997, Mr. Mallon was suspended from duty and accused, in the words of Robert Turnbull, the then deputy chief constable, of

"activity that could be construed as criminal".

That allegation has been hanging over Mr. Mallon for more than two years; his expenses and his private life have been probed. However, like the other suspended officers, he has yet to have a single disciplinary or criminal charge brought against him as a result of Lancet.

In the meantime, the burglary rate in Mr. Mallon's former beat, Middlesbrough, has risen by almost 30 per cent., and street crime and muggings are on the increase. That Cleveland ratepayers have now been handed one of the highest police precept increases in Britain is due in no small part to the cost of Lancet. Part of my constituency postbag shows that a key element of community concern is Lancet, its impact on police morale and the knock-on effects on my constituents.

Operation Lancet displays alarming similarities to a PCA probe into allegations against police officers on Humberside. That investigation ended a month before Mr. Mallon was suspended: it took six years to complete, cost £4 million pounds and resulted in more than 20 officers being investigated, but ended without a single disciplinary or criminal charge being brought. It appears that the PCA is able to operate with an open time scale, an open remit and an open cheque book. There is no concern about the effect that lengthy suspensions and damaging unproven allegations can have on officers who have spent many years serving the public.

In Operation Lancet, it is of great concern that the majority of suspensions and disciplinary notices have arisen from complaints from known criminals or those facing criminal charges. In some cases, those criminals have not, as might have been expected, made complaints to their solicitors or the courts; instead, their complaints have emerged after Lancet officers visited them in prison. It is crazy that hard-working detectives who have dramatically reduced crime by targeting and locking up offenders now find themselves suspended on the word of criminals whom they put behind bars. Unfortunately, it appears that Lancet is being used within Cleveland police force as an excuse to settle old scores and petty jealousies. Office politics has led to elderly people in my constituency suffering from crime and the fear of crime.

No one, least of all me, is suggesting that allegations of malpractice by police officers should be ignored. However, I share the concerns of Lord Mackenzie, a former serving senior police officer, that Operation Lancet has not been properly ring-fenced. Rather than being a tightly focused operation, the probe is taking on the appearance of an expedition to a hitherto unexplored river, as explorers investigate every minor tributary.

I am also concerned by the way in which senior officers can launch inquiries such as Lancet but escape future accountability. Ray Mallon and other senior officers were suspended from duty by the then deputy chief constable of the Cleveland force, Robert Turnbull. If Mr. Turnbull had grave concerns or, indeed, any sense of duty or responsibility, he would surely have seen the inquiry through. Instead, he took the opportunity to tell his employers, the police authority, that he wanted to retire; he was allowed to do so only 20 months into his five-year contract.

Mr. Turnbull's retirement did not last long: within weeks, he had applied for and was promptly appointed to the post of deputy commissioner for the sunny Turks and Caicos Islands—a few thousand miles away from Cleveland and Operation Lancet. The Cleveland public have not been given a satisfactory explanation of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Turnbull's rapid departure; nor have they been allowed to see the reference provided by the chief constable of Cleveland police that helped Mr. Turnbull to land his job in the sun. It is generally known that serious allegations have been made in respect of Mr. Turnbull's conduct, but he will not have to answer them or justify his decision to suspend Mr. Mallon and his colleagues.

Within the past month, Mr. Andrew Timpson, the head of Lancet and chief constable of Warwickshire, has also had to leave his employment under a cloud. He, too, should have to answer questions about issues that he dealt with in his time, one of the most serious of which emerged only this week.

I am informed that, when Mr. Turnbull left to seek his fortune in the Caribbean, a colleague of his, Mr. David Earnshaw, was appointed by Cleveland's chief constable to assume responsibility for complaints and disciplinary matters within the force. That means that Mr. Earnshaw now has direct day-to-day involvement with the Lancet inquiry and that he would adjudicate in the inquiry and advise the Lancet team. However, I have learned that, prior to his departure, Mr. Timpson was clearly told by several people that Mr. Earnshaw could be implicated in serious allegations about his role and conduct.

I have been told by solicitors acting for Ray Mallon that Mr. Earnshaw was to have been the recipient of a regulation 6 notice, which would have told him that

[Dr. Ashok Kumar]

investigations were to be carried out to establish the truth or otherwise of the allegations. However, it appears that Mr. Earnshaw has not yet been served with that notice.

It is incumbent on the House to ask why such a senior officer has been allowed to remain in post with the specific remit held by Mr. Earnshaw when there is doubt about his conduct. That prompts the questions of why the notice has not been proceeded with and whether Mr. Earnshaw is a suitable person to occupy his current position. Only Cleveland's chief constable and Mr. Timpson can answer those questions, and it appears likely that Mr. Timpson's answer would be the most relevant.

The problems do not end there. More people are jumping ship: in the past few weeks, Mr. Richard Brunstrom, who was effectively number two in the Cleveland police authority, has left to take up a new post in north Wales. The Police Complaints Authority, which appointed Mr. Timpson, has replaced him with Mr. Lloyd Clarke, the deputy chief constable of west Yorkshire. He faces the unenviable task of wading through the 26,000 documents that Operation Lancet has produced so far. The Police Complaints Authority is to investigate Mr. Timpson after serious allegations by members of his staff.

It is wrong that senior officers such as Mr. Turnbull, and possibly Mr. Timpson, who make the serious and far-reaching decisions to suspend serving officers, can escape accountability by retiring or stepping down. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that, in future, officers who are members of the Association of Chief Police Officers, and who make such serious decisions, are accountable for their actions—whether they are still in service or not—when such inquiries are completed.

My hon. Friend should also revise the way in which police investigate themselves. In the case of Mr. Mallon, it is no longer a matter of establishing the truth but of desperately trying to justify the enormous cost, time, manpower and hype that Operation Lancet has generated.

It would focus minds if the Police Complaints Authority were given a fixed budget rather than an open cheque book that is underwritten by the hapless council tax payer. It would mean that inquiries were not launched without firm evidence on which to base them. There should also be a limit on the time a police officer can be suspended from duty without charges being brought. I have met and listened to Cleveland police officers who have graphically described the devastating impact of such lengthy suspensions on their lives. Marriage break-ups, suicide attempts and severe illnesses have ensued as Lancet continues its seemingly endless task.

I resent it when outsiders, who seem to have no knowledge of Lancet's impact on the morale of serving police officers on Teesside and its generation of a lack of confidence in the police, criticise me for investigating and highlighting those anxieties. If officers who investigate murder and other serious crimes have to work to set limits, why cannot the Police Complaints Authority do the same? Time limits will ensure that the serious step of suspending an officer will not be taken without solid evidence for doing so.

No one wants to protect the small number of officers who are corrupt and a disgrace to their badge. However, a better regulated and more focused Police Complaints Authority should devote time and resources to rooting out corrupt cops instead of making sweeping accusations, which are never proven, against many officers. Too many people wring their hands and claim that Lancet and similar inquiries should be allowed to run their course, whatever the cost, the impact on the public, the public purse and public confidence. I do not agree with that view; enough is enough. The people of Teesside want a police force that investigates and roots out crime, not a force whose senior management team is made to devote its energies to investigating every nook and cranny of its force.

Ray Mallon and his colleagues have been suspended for more than two years. In my opinion, and that of many of my constituents, that is long enough for those investigating to charge them or allow them to return to work. I believe that Ray Mallon is an honest and sincere man, who merely wants to return to doing what he is best at: rooting out and eradicating crime on the streets and in the communities of Teesside.

I do not want the farce to continue, and Mr. Mallon to become a modern Captain Dreyfus. The majority of police in Cleveland and throughout the country are honest, hard-working officers who deserve better than to have their reputations sullied at public expense by convicted criminals, unfocused fishing expeditions and senior officers who jump ship rather than shoulder their responsibilities.

I am grateful for the opportunity of putting on record for the first time many of the comments that I have made in private. The matter that we are considering is crucial to my constituents—both police and public.

12.48 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) for giving me his permission to contribute to the debate. He is a good friend of many years' standing, and we have discussed Operation Lancet often and at length. I have had to tell him that I believe him to be wrong. I fear that I must repeat that view today.

I have tried to explain to my hon. Friend that if the Minister and I investigate the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), the shadow spokesman, for nefarious activity, the hon. Gentleman will want to know two things: how much we know and how much we are in danger of discovering. That would give him the opportunity—as he is an ex-policeman—to cover his tracks. We are trying to deal with such a process.

I have a copy of a letter from the solicitor for Superintendent Raymond Mallon, who is my constituent. I have read the solicitor's assertions and also the letter that was sent to him on 25 March. That letter states plainly the nature of the allegations against his client. The solicitor has not contradicted them or made a counter proposal. He has not even acknowledged the letter other than to send a letter that makes a disclosure about regulation 6 disciplinary notices.

My hon. Friend has issued a press release in his usual efficient way—I do not mean that disparagingly. It claims that

"hatreds and jealousies are endemic in the force"

and that morale is plummeting. I shall quote not policemen's views about Cleveland constabulary, but parts of this year's report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. The inspector was

"impressed with the standard of crime and disorder reduction",

and with the partnership proposals. The report states that

"commitment is strong, the expertise of staff is impressive".

It continues:

"Her Majesty's Inspector is fully satisfied with the probity of complaints investigation by the Force . . . Her Majesty's Inspector found morale to be generally buoyant with the vast majority of staff wanting to 'get on with the job' . . . Her Majesty's Inspector continues to have confidence in the Force and its leadership."

The inspector also found

"bitterness and depth of feeling that he has rarely witnessed before",

but those feelings were expressed by the people under investigation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East makes the point that much time and £2.5 million have been spent on the investigation, which continues.

What does my hon. Friend want to do: throw the time and the money out of the window? That does not make sense to me. Scrutiny of this kind must be completed. One cannot apply a guillotine to such inquiries because we do not know how long the investigations will take. I must say candidly that the number of questions raised and the media concentration prompted by those questions have prolonged this investigation and incurred more cost.

This is about washing one's laundry in public. The essential point is that, at the end of the day, the laundry must be clean. We cannot put a time limit on the inquiry process. I ask my hon. Friend to reconsider and not to place himself in a position where, quite unwittingly, he may become an ally of those who do not wish to be discovered.

12.51 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) on securing this debate and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) for his contribution—although I cannot agree with his suggestion that the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) would seek to evade justice for his political crimes, past and present. That remark was totally uncharacteristic of my hon. Friend and I cannot associate myself with it.

I will make only two points of substance: first, we must inquire into issues of this kind in order to establish the truth; and secondly, such inquiries should take place as rapidly as possible. I begin by referring to the state of the Cleveland force. Her Majesty's inspector recently published his inspection report into Cleveland police. It found that overall recorded crime in Cleveland increased by 0.1 per cent. during 1998–99 and that violent crime accounted for 6.3 per cent. of all crimes recorded in Cleveland, compared with 11.9 per cent. nation wide.

There is nothing to suggest any connection between the matters under investigation and the positive approach to policing in Cleveland, which I fully support and to which I know the force remains committed. I understand further from Cleveland police that crime decreased by another 2 per cent. in the first six months of this year and is now at a 10-year low.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North said in his speech, the recent report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary described general morale in Cleveland as "buoyant". There is no reason to doubt the validity of that assessment. I have noted the strength of support for the positive policing methods employed by Cleveland police.

The Cleveland police budget is £83.3 million for 1999–2000, which is an increase of 3.6 per cent. over last year. Latest estimates indicate that, in 1999–2000, Cleveland police will spend £145.90 per head of population, which is above the estimated average of £115.29 for English shire counties. Cleveland police had 1,400 officers at the end of March 1999.

That is the background to the inquiry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East said, Operation Lancet—the investigation of Cleveland police—resulted from disturbing allegations of serious misconduct against a number of officers. It is a fundamental and important principle that such allegations are investigated thoroughly, and I am pleased that the force has acted robustly to deal with these matters.

I must seriously contest only one point in my hon. Friend's speech. There is no substance in the suggestion that the inquiry is about justifying past expenditure rather than trying to get to the facts of the case. I believe profoundly that all concerned are trying to get to the facts and address important and difficult issues.

My hon. Friend is right to identify the fact that several officers have been suspended. A number of possible criminal and disciplinary matters are being addressed and eight officers remain suspended from duty. As my hon. Friend knows, matters involving the suspension of police officers before 1 April 1999 are governed by the Police (Discipline) Regulations 1985, which state that an officer may be suspended from the force by his chief officer if it appears that he may have committed a disciplinary offence. Suspensions among the Cleveland police are reviewed regularly. Unless the chief officer decides otherwise, the suspensions will continue either until it is decided not to bring disciplinary charges or until the case is resolved. That is, quite properly, a matter of judgment for the chief constable of Cleveland police.

It is not appropriate for me, as a Home Office Minister, to comment about on-going criminal or disciplinary investigations. I shall not follow my hon. Friend in reciting the details that he gave, as comments on my part could prejudice any possible criminal proceedings. That convention is well established, and I intend to respect it today. The Home Secretary has a role in the disciplinary process as the appellate authority, and may be called upon in that capacity to consider any future disciplinary appeals from officers arising from the inquiry.

That is my first point: the inquiry is necessary and it is taking place. We must discover the full facts. I believe that is the only basis upon which the people of Cleveland can be truly confident that any concerns about the situation have been investigated and considered properly.

My second point—and here my views are alongside those expressed by my hon. Friend—relates to timing. This is a wide-ranging inquiry and one of the largest supervised by the Police Complaints Authority. The length of the investigation is a matter for the investigating officer and the PCA, but it is in no one's interest to

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prolong it any longer than necessary. There has been close consultation with the Crown Prosecution Service throughout.

I cannot agree with the suggestion that a time limit should be imposed, but I can associate myself with my hon. Friend's sentiments that it is desirable for all concerned that the inquiry be concluded as rapidly as possible. That is an entirely understandable and fair point. However, I emphasise that the desire to reach a conclusion must not inhibit the need to get all the facts into the open and to conduct the inquiry in the fullest possible way. That must be the first consideration.

Finally, on the general issues that my hon. Friend raised regarding the complaints procedure. He referred to time limiting the inquiry and the suspensions of police officers in certain circumstances, and raised issues of accountability, cost and expenditure. Those points are legitimate when considering the working of the complaints system. Some of the issues that my hon. Friend raised in relation to this inquiry extend to other inquiries that will take place in other parts of the country.

Some of these concerns were addressed by the Macpherson inquiry following the death of Stephen Lawrence. The Government understand the anxiety about the police investigating themselves. That is why the Government accepted the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee and the Macpherson report that the Home Office should examine the feasibility of an independent investigation of complaints against the police and various other processes and procedures. Our consultants, KPMG, are carrying out that work and will report by spring next year. We will decide how to proceed on the basis of those findings and of the contributions made by my hon. Friends and others about this and further cases.

There is no doubt that a complaints process in which everybody has confidence is critical to the respect and support for the police that exists in communities throughout this country. That is why I take seriously general points about the nature of the complaints process. I shall certainly consider them.

I return to my two fundamental points. First, we must have an inquiry and establish the facts. That is the pre-eminent issue: we must be sure about the exact situation. Secondly, while accepting that constraint, we must move as fast as we can to reveal the information so that any uncertainties and doubts—some of which my hon. Friend referred to—can be resolved effectively.

I know that my remarks will not answer completely the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East. I hope that I have addressed the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North. I look forward to seeing the matter resolved and the Cleveland population's confidence in the Cleveland police strengthened.

Stonnall Road Bail Hostel, Aldridge

12.59 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): In March this year, I was notified by the Home Office on the Friday morning before the Thursday in question that a violent rapist was to be sent to a bail hostel in my constituency. The Home Office expressed regret at the lateness of the notification, but the Minister, Lord Williams of Mostyn—to his credit—arranged to see me at short notice. That meeting took place on the day before the violent rapist was due to come to the Stonnall road bail hostel. I quite understand that he was not able to see me before that, because he had urgent duties in Parliament. He saw me at the earliest possible time.

I was able to make representations about this case. I first raised the issue of the unsuitability of the site as evidenced in the planning inspector's inquiry into an appeal by west midlands probation committee in which the inspector noted that the Home Office guidance note on the location of bail hostels was not met at Stonnall road. I also reminded the Minister of the fear element that was weighed in that judgment and that was subsequently addressed in an appeal by the probation service first to the High Court and then to the Court of Appeal. Both courts found that the inspector had considered those matters appropriately in the context of his responsibilities.

The second point that I raised was about the process of evaluation of placements whereby, in the case of the violent rapist, even the officer then in charge of Aldridge police station did not know that a released category A violent rapist was to be moved into his bailiwick.

My third point was that the category A prisoner in question would, because of his size and colour, not pass without comment in the very homogeneous community of Druids Heath and that his secret introduction into the bail hostel would exacerbate and reinforce the local fears already raised by the management of the bail hostel and by the incidents perceived by residents. Officers of the probation service have attended public meetings and have heard the alarm of local residents, of local councillors and of myself.

Fourthly, I have made representations and expressed concerns about a system of management that could set aside the observations and conclusions of a planning inspector that have significant implications for the original purpose of the building as a bail hostel. Although the planning inspector's approach was upheld in the High Court and Court of Appeal, it was decided to accommodate a man described by one of the senior representatives of the agencies involved in placement as "my worst nightmare". I advised Lord Williams, as I had done the chief probation officer for the west midlands, that I would feel in conscience bound that it was my duty to notify local residents that there may be a danger. I also argued that the appropriate way forward was for the authorities to apply what is known in the United States as Megan's law and to notify local residents of the possibility of an increased risk to the community.

In the event, and to forestall disclosure, the west midlands probation service did not place the released violent rapist in Stonnall road. The Home Secretary and his office were aware of my concern.

Two weeks ago, at 9.49 am on Thursday 28 October, I received a fax from the office of the Minister of State advising me of the arrival that day of a convicted

paedophile. This man has spent 39 of the last 43 years behind bars. He was last sentenced in January 1998 to three years in prison for the attempted abduction of a 13-year-old boy. When he was released earlier this year, he broke the conditions of his bail within 24 hours and was subsequently returned to prison to serve a further six months of his sentence. The authorities had, therefore, more than six months to prepare for his release back into the community. Apparently, as in the earlier case I described, they did not think it appropriate to give much notice to the Minister to enable him to notify the local Member of Parliament or to make such inquiries as he may have thought necessary to satisfy himself that the arrangements were suitable.

The Minister has been placed in a difficult position. His office received details of the release very late—on the day before. His private office then faxed me the details—as I said, at 9.49 am on the morning of the release—and the fax was signed by a member of his office and dated the day before. I immediately telephoned the Minister and, when he was notified of my urgent call, he responded as soon as possible, about an hour later, while on a ministerial visit to Feltham young offenders institution.

In the meantime, I telephoned the Home Secretary's private office and advised them that the circumstances of the release that day left me no alternative but to notify local residents of the authorities' decision to place in the Stonnall road hostel a potentially dangerous man. When I spoke to the Minister, I advised him that the timing and the intent of the authorities left me with no alternative but to release to the public his confidential letter.

I then spoke with our most senior local police officer and with the assistant chief probation officer and advised them that I was releasing the Minister's letter. They already knew that I would do that, because of the earlier case of the violent rapist, but the Minister may not have known, because he had had no opportunity to review my previous representations and my stated intent of advising my constituents if the possibility of a danger to them arose. I released the letter, and the authorities directed the paedophile away from Stonnall road bail hostel.

The Home Office issued a press released head "Statement from the Home Office on Dangerous Offenders", thus confirming that the man in question was dangerous. It stated:

"It is not Home Office policy to discuss the detailed arrangements for the release of dangerous offenders.

We inform MPs of these announcements where they involve a placement in their constituencies so that they are reassured about the importance attached to public protection, and to assist in ensuring that an understandably apprehensive public are properly informed. We rely on MPs to exercise proper judgement in these matters."

Two paragraphs later, it adds:

"The police, probation service and other agencies are experienced and effective in managing the risk posed by the release of dangerous offenders and deal with cases on a routine basis.

One of the most significant problems in managing this risk can be public attention. It is understandable that the public are concerned about the presence of dangerous offenders in their communities. But if those offenders are being managed and monitored by the relevant professional agencies the risk they pose is minimised. The risk to the public is greatly increased if public attention forces offenders 'underground' and out of contact with the public protection agencies."

As the press release contains the most recent formal expression of Home Office policy on notifying Members of Parliament, I should like to ask what it means. When it states:

"We inform MPs of these announcements where they involve a placement in their constituencies",

the obvious question is, what announcements? It continues:

"so they are reassured about the importance attached to public protection".

In what way can a same-day fax reassure me, or anyone else for that matter, of the importance attached to public protection? The actions of the authorities in the case that I have described provide evidence as to why I am not reassured about the importance attached to public protection. The fact that I am not able to make representations and that a 24-hour curfew may be in place even though a senior police officer is unaware of it undermines confidence in what I am increasingly coming to believe is merely a bureaucratic exercise.

The press release goes on to say that the purpose of the announcements is

"to assist in ensuring that an understandably apprehensive public are properly informed."

In what way? The authorities, despite having the power to inform the public in these cases, resolutely, and often indignantly, refuse to do so. Who, then, informs the "understandably apprehensive public"? The police will not; the probation service will not, and Ministers will not.

The release continues:

"We rely on MPs to exercise proper judgement in these matters."

If that judgment, as in my case, leads an MP to the conclusion that what I shall call "Megan's law" should apply, and he or she should advise those affected, whom they are elected to represent, the authorities express anger and even outrage to the media. Having denied the Minister the opportunity of notifying the MP in good time, they then round on the MP for notifying his constituents of the possibility of danger or advising them to be more cautious on behalf of themselves and their children.

The notification of elected representatives must mean more than trying to envelope the local MP in a cloak of complicity should anything go wrong. It is intolerable that I should know of such a situation and therefore be able quietly to make arrangements further to ensure my safety or that of those whom I love, while denying my friends and neighbours and those who elected me the same opportunity. Should anything go wrong with what experience has reluctantly led me to conclude is now a rather mechanistic and bureaucratic framework, and a child were abducted or a woman raped, when such a crime might have been avoided if children were accompanied and women warned, would I not be party to a great wrong?

For my part, I believe that it is the duty of the authorities to notify all those affected—those who are at risk if something should go wrong—and not just the MP. That is not only a discretion for Ministers and the authorities; it is a duty, and I would argue that, in this country, it is the right of those who might be affected to be notified. We are warned about burglars, but not about something that might be far more dangerous.

Coming into the Chamber, I received a letter signed by the Home Secretary, which I shall quote because it is

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germane and should be a warning to everyone who represents constituents. The letter said:

"I am writing to express my disappointment and frustration that you have failed to respect the confidence placed in you by Paul Boateng in his letter to you of 28 October regarding the release of a dangerous offender.

You have on many occasions expressed the concern residents feel about the presence of known dangerous offenders and sex offenders in their communities. That is understandable. Protection of the public is a primary function of the police, prison and probation services. That is why, as you know, great care is undertaken through multi-agency public protection planning by prison, police and probation services to put in place procedures to supervise such offenders on release from prison. The aim is to ensure that the public are properly protected. This includes, in appropriate cases, arranging 24 hour curfews and surveillance in a suitable probation hostel. If those plans are jeopardised the services may have to resort to alternatives which offer less protection. In extreme cases offenders have to be released without supervision into the community, which puts the public more at risk."

The final paragraph of the letter states:

"I believe we acted responsibly in giving you full information in confidence and that you did not act responsibly in betraying that confidence. Fortunately in this case alternatives were found and the public were not put at risk. But they might have been. I am afraid that I can no longer guarantee that you will be notified of any future cases."

That is the Home Secretary's response. I do not blame him for that. It was probably manufactured in the probation unit within the Home Office. I think that there is a symbiotic relationship between captured agencies that now no longer view these matters objectively. How dare the Home Secretary, who clearly has not read his own press release, which talks in some peculiar way about the release of information, say that when there is a threat in the community, he will now deny that information to the elected representatives of that community? That creates a closed, secretive world of bureaucratic administration.

I may sound indignant about the Home Secretary's response, which does not address the responsibilities of elected Ministers to notify and keep informed Members of Parliament if there is a danger within their constituency. The burden of the argument is, as I have made clear, that no one is appropriately notified. In the case of the rapist earlier this year, neither the Minister nor the senior police officer within the division affected by the 24-hour curfew was notified. Much, much worse, in that case, is that not even the inspector in charge of the local police station in Aldridge was aware that a violent rapist who had been released from prison was about to descend on his area.

I am told that this bureaucratic melange is, in the Home Secretary's view, secure and wise. I want women to have the opportunity to close windows that might give access to a rapist, or parents of the young children at the two schools in the vicinity of the establishment to be advised that they may want to walk 11, 12 or 13-year-olds to school. Why is that burden placed on me? It is the duty of the authorities to notify people of such dangers.

The authorities cannot say that my actions came as a surprise. The Home Secretary himself knew that I intended to take action where there was a possible danger to my constituents. Lord Williams of Mostyn knew that. The west midlands probation service knew that. The police authorities, including a representative from Birmingham with responsibility for the matter, knew that. Notwithstanding all that knowledge, the authorities placed the Minister in the position of having to fax me a letter on the morning of the prisoner's release, and they are trying to tell me that the arrangements are secure, suitable and reliable. My experience has led me to believe that all is not well in the management of the probation service in the west midlands.

The Minister will, by this time, know full well the planning history of the case. He will know that a former deputy chief probation officer misled the local councillors about whether Walsall magistrates court and Aldridge magistrates court had specifically stated their agreement that the location was appropriate for a bail hostel. He will also know of the corrective letter from the Walsall magistrates clerk saying that, in the minutes, that agreement had not been given. Such events undermine local attention to the activities of the probation service and the system in which it works. Doubts are justified, and any Member of Parliament would have been concerned.

Those events have taken place over years, and I do not now take at face value what I am told by those who administer the probation service. I know that their task is enormously difficult, but what I am saying applies to every MP who has a prison or a bail hostel in their area. These are not easy decisions, yet it is cast on MPs to take on themselves tasks for which they are not properly prepared. I cannot oversee the work of the probation service and I cannot sit outside the bail hostel to see whether it works; I have to use the eyes and ears of those who live in the immediate area. I live not far from that area.

In the United States, a tragic incident occurred—the murder of a little girl called Megan. She was murdered by a neighbour who, the authorities subsequently acknowledged, had twice been convicted of sexual offences. In New Jersey, laws, based on the old common law, were passed to give common law rights to citizens to be advised of a danger. I shall read "A Citizen's Guide to Megan's Law" which answers common questions about the law. The guide is accessible through the modern media—through the internet and in other ways. The guide states:

"What is the purpose of Megan's Law?

Megan's Law is designed to help protect our communities by providing information about convicted sex offenders to law enforcement agencies and, in the case of moderate and high risk offenders, community organizations and the public. The notice will allow communities to take informed and responsible steps to prevent harm.

Are all sex offenders required to register with local police?

Sex offenders who have been released from custody since Megan's Law went into effect on Oct. 31, 1994, are required to register with the police. In addition, offenders who were on parole or probation on the effective date of the law, as well as offenders who have been found to be repetitive and compulsive by experts and the courts—regardless of the date of sentence—are required to register. Some registrants must verify their addresses annually; others must verify their addresses every 90 days.

What types of offenses require registration?

The offenses include aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault, aggravated criminal sexual contact, endangering the welfare of a child by engaging in sexual conduct which would impair or debauch the morals of the child, luring or enticing and, if the victim were a minor and the offender not a parent, kidnapping, criminal restraint and false imprisonment.

How does the notification process work?

The state Departments of Corrections and Human Services are responsible for informing county prosecutors about the anticipated release of sex offenders. In turn, the prosecutors must determine risk to the community—the likelihood that the offender will commit another crime. Hearings are provided to those offenders who challenge the prosecutor's risk determination or the proposed scope of notification.

Will I always be notified if a convicted sex offender moves into my neighborhood?

Under the law, sex offenders who reside in the community are classified by prosecutors in one of three 'tiers' based on the degree of risk they pose to the public: high (Tier 3), moderate (Tier 2) or low (Tier 1). Neighbors are notified of high risk offenders. Registered community organizations involved with children or with victims of sexual abuse, schools, day care centers and summer camps are notified of moderate and high risk offenders because of the possibility that pedophiles and sexual predators will be drawn to these places. Staff members at those facilities who deal directly with children or victims are provided with information about the sex offender. Law enforcement agencies are notified of the presence of all sex offenders.

What factors are considered in determining the risk of re-offense?

Megan's Law and its guidelines list numerous factors to be considered in weighing the risk of re-offence, including post-incarceration supervision, the status of therapy or counseling, criminal background, degree of remorse for criminal acts, substance abuse, employment or schooling status, psychological or psychiatric profile, and a history of threats or of stalking locations where children congregate.

What information is provided in a notification?

In all three levels of notification, the information provided includes the offender's name, description and photograph, address, place of employment or school if applicable, a description of the offender's vehicle and license plate number, and a brief description of the offense.

How will I be informed?

You will receive personal notification of the location of all Tier 3 (high risk) offenders in your neighborhood that you are likely to encounter. A law enforcement official, such as a police officer, state police trooper or investigator from your county prosecutor's office, will come to your door and provide you with the pertinent information about offenders in your neighborhood."

The guide answers the question

"What should I do if I receive a notification"?

It continues:

"Are there any other steps I can take to protect my family?

Yes, There is no law that can ever completely protect us. Adults need to teach children about basic safety precautions. Check with your child's school to determine whether a program is in place to teach children about strangers. Also, check with the school and other locations where your child spends time on a regular basis to determine whether safety precautions are in place.

What am I prohibited from doing?

The prosecutor and the courts are responsible to determine who should receive notice about the presence of a particular individual in the community. You should not take it upon yourself to provide any information you receive to others in the community; that is the job of the prosecutor and local law enforcement. Any actions taken against the individual named in the notification, including vandalism of property, verbal or written threats of harm, or physical violence against this person, his or her family or employer, will result in arrest and prosecution for criminal acts. Vigilantism is not only a crime, it is an action that will undermine the efforts of those who have worked hard to enact this law."

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Has enough time been left for the Minister to respond? I do not that think that there will be enough time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. It is not for the Chair to stop an hon. Member who has initiated an Adjournment Debate, but it is normal courtesy to allow the Minister some time to respond. An Adjournment Debate is an occasion when Back-Bench Members can seek explanations from Ministers. However, the matter must be left entirely to the judgment of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd).

Mr. Shepherd: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I was obviously thrown by the letter from the Home Secretary. The last paragraph of that letter threatens not to notify me of matters about which it is the Home Secretary's duty to inform an elected Member of Parliament. Having made that point, I shall sit down.

1.27 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): I have three minutes in which to respond to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). He well knows that all Members of the House are concerned about dangerous offenders and sex offenders being accommodated in their constituencies. As he has acknowledged, he is also aware of the complex considerations that have to be made, and the difficult and delicate balance that has to be achieved, by the police and probation services in coming to decisions on the placement of such offenders.

The hon. Gentleman is aware that we, at the Home Office, take extremely seriously our role of ensuring that the risk to, and the protection of, the public are at the forefront of the minds of all those in agencies who make decisions on the placement of individuals in probation hostels. No one has taken more seriously than my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary his role of ensuring that public protection comes first on all occasions, in relation to dangerous offenders—especially sex offenders. My right hon. Friend initiated the special arrangements that now exist to advise and inform Members of decisions made about dangerous individuals who may be placed in their constituencies. None of my right hon. Friend's predecessors has taken as much care, and given as much attention to the problem as he has done. I hope that the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills will give the Home Secretary credit for that. The hon. Gentleman nods his head. He will also appreciate that the Labour Government introduced the Sex Offenders Act 1997 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. We have set up systems to ensure that the police and probation services work more closely together than was previously the case on risk assessment for offenders inside and outside prisons. All that was designed to protect the public.

However, none of those measures will effectively secure the public interest if we cannot be satisfied that dangerous offenders are placed in hostel accommodation only when the necessary arrangements to protect the public are in place with the local police and probation services—occasionally with the local health service. In the full glare of publicity, that is seldom—if ever—the case. Through the hon. Gentleman's conduct of this particular case, he—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must now move on to the next debate.

Salmon Fishing

1.30 pm

Mr. Denis Murphy (Wansbeck): I am grateful for the opportunity to secure this debate. I shall concentrate my remarks concerning drift-net salmon fishing on the Northumberland coast, dealing specifically with the village of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, although I am sure that what I have to say applies to fishing communities throughout the north-east of England.

By means of introduction, I shall give a brief history of fishing in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea. It would be true to say that fishing has always been a part of village life. The first recorded reference to it was in 1199, when Eustace Baliol confirmed his grandfather's grant in 1138 of a toft in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea to the monks of Newminster abbey, and added to it a grant of a fishing boat. A toft was a homestead, indicating the serfdom of mediaeval fishermen of the area.

The serfdom to the Church continued long after the feudal system had ended elsewhere, and it was not until 1771 that local fishermen refused to pay a tithe for the clergy's support. The rebellion of 1771 led to the partial closure of the fishermen's chapel of St. Bartholomew, when the rector, Henry Latton, retaliated by discontinuing regular services. Several attempts were made to settle the tithes of the fishery, but regular church services were not resumed until 1846.

The coble—the fishing vessel that is used today—also has a long history. In 1626, Sir John Delaval reported that there were 16 fishermen in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea working four cobles. A coble is a distinctive open, flat-bottomed fishing boat, which responds well to oars and sail, and can be hauled on to beaches and launched simply. Two hundred years later, the number of cobles had risen to eight, and increased steadily until 1831, when 27 operated out of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea.

Fishing expanded rapidly from the middle of the 19th century until the start of the first world war. That was the era of the herring boom, when "travelling [illegible] herring" became a way of life for fishermen, coopers, curers, and female fish-packers and gutters. Newbiggin-by-the-Sea played an important part during that time, when coopering and smoking facilities were installed in the village. In 1869, 142 cobles were recorded in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea when fishing legislation required compulsory registration of fishing vessels.

Fishing was and continues to be a very hard life. During the period that I have described, all the family played an important role. The fisherwomen were work partners of their menfolk; they would not only collect and bait lines, but take part in hauling the family boat across the beach, and in launching and retrieving it from the sea. On the coble's return, mothers, wives and daughters had to be on the beach to haul the boat, load it and take part in the beach auction of the catch. Similarly, as the menfolk manned the Royal National Lifeboat Institution lifeboat, the ladies helped launch it by dragging it down to the sea. That practice continued right up until the 1950s, when tractors were introduced.

Today, seven cobles sail out of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea. Eight larger vessels, which require harbour facilities, fish from Blyth. Although fishing continues to be a demanding and dangerous occupation, it is a way of life that is valued greatly by those who take part in it. Its traditions stretch for generations. I would like to see that way of life continue. I hope to demonstrate why the fishing communities that I represent have an excellent case for the reinstatement of the length of their season.

I stress that I am very concerned about conserving fishing stocks. The fishermen assure me that it is in their interests to ensure continued conservation. All they ask is that they are treated fairly—which I do not think happened last year. Prior to the beginning of the fishing season last year, fishermen were advised before taking out their licences that the season might be shortened. They started fishing at the beginning of March, and were instructed to stop almost immediately. They could not begin again until 1 June. They effectively lost 44 days of a fishing season which lasts for only 113 days.

I was approached by the fishermen on the issue and wrote to the Minister requesting, first, that the fishermen be compensated for the shortening of the season—at the very least by returning a part of their licence fee—and, secondly, that the season be extended by approximately 20 days until the end of September. I am most grateful that, at very short notice, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State met a delegation of fishermen from Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, and listened to and reported on their concerns. Unfortunately, they received no compensation. I feel that the buck of responsibility for extending the fishing season or, indeed, paying compensation, was passed between the Environment Agency and MAFF.

It would appear that the decision to shorten the 1999 season was made on advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. It advised the Government that stocks of multi-sea winter salmon—salmon that spend more than one winter at sea—in the north Atlantic had fallen to very low levels, and that extreme caution should be exercised in their management.

It is, however, also true that the north-east has not been as badly affected by the decline in spring salmon as other regions. Indeed, 1999 has seen some of the largest catches ever in the Tyne and other salmon rivers of Northumberland. Huge catches of salmon have been recorded recently in the River Tyne. On one beat alone, 80 fish were brought to the net in six days. In another part of the river, one angler accounted for 45 salmon of up to 21 lb over four days. There are many other examples of enormous catches of salmon in Northumberland.

The fishermen whom I met expressed serious concerns about the very powerful angling lobby—some members of whom they think are employed by the Environment Agency in fisheries management. How many individuals employed in fisheries management hold angling licences issued by the agency? If there are people with angling licences who are involved in decision making in fisheries management, how does the agency ensure impartiality?

Bearing in mind the decision not to extend the salmon season into September, does the Minister intend introducing mandatory catch and release at the back end of the angling season in order to protect multi-sea winter stocks? I suppose that it is a measure of the netsmen's suspicion of the agency that they asked me specifically to pose those questions.

Personally, I have nothing against anglers. Indeed, I fished for many years. I am, however, concerned about the future livelihood of people whom I represent.

The potential for fishing salmon has declined dramatically over recent years. Even during the present season, fishing is limited to Monday to Friday—Monday, 6 am to 8 pm, Tuesday to Thursday, 4 am to 8 pm and Friday, 4 am to 6 pm. Night and weekend fishing have gradually been eroded.

The water off Northumberland is also a major factor. For days on end during the season, boats cannot get out to fish. As a result of pressure to maximise their catch over such a short season, fishermen take more risks with the weather.

If my hon. Friend the Minister is convinced that spring fish are threatened, why will he not allow an extension of the season into September to compensate the fishermen? That would give them only 20 days in return for the 44 that they lose at the start of the season. I genuinely urge him to consider that. I also ask him to consider local circumstances. There is genuine evidence for not restricting the season.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Gentleman knows that the issue also affects the ports from Amble to Holy Island in my constituency. Does he recognise that licensing a fishery is one method of policing? If the Environment Agency in the region is to have its grant cut by about a third, as seems to be the case, it is inconceivable that it will be able effectively to police what goes on in either rivers or the sea unless there is a sensible season. Fishermen out at sea are very quick to point out when somebody is trying to muscle in on a fishery for which they are not licensed.

Mr. Murphy: I agree with the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Gentleman in that timely intervention.

In conclusion, I have tried to show the House that this type of fishing is much more than a job; it is a way of life. The Newbiggin fishermen can trace their lineage back for generations. The sight of fishing cobles pulled up on the beach has been seen for centuries.

I ask the Minister to strike a fair balance between the drift-net fishermen and the rod fishermen. Yet again, I ask him to consider compensation for the shortening of last year's season, and to enter into discussions with the fishing organisations now, to ensure that there is no repeat of last year's timing.

Finally, I remind the House that yet another way of life in our region is threatened; for with the recent announcement of the closure of Ellington colliery, we could see the end of 600 years of rich mining heritage. I genuinely urge the Minister to ensure that coble fishing does not follow it.

1.40 pm

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) on securing the debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution.

I represent a number of salmon netsmen in my constituency, including those operating mainly out of Cullercoats. They are among the 180 or so fishermen and 75 boats from the north-east that were affected by the Environment Agency's decision to shorten the salmon season by, effectively, eight weeks.

The fishermen that I speak to do recognise the need for effective conservation measures, although at times the salmon net fishermen appear to believe that they are something of an endangered species themselves. Nevertheless, there was some scepticism over the effects of shortening the season in such an arbitrary way, as there is a view that spring fish, if not caught by nets during the early part of the season, would be caught by rods later. In fact, the impact of the shortened season on the incomes of the salmon net fishermen was much clearer and more demonstrable, and that appears to have had the effect of pushing them towards, and increasing pressure on, other inshore fisheries.

Netsmen in the north-east consider themselves to have been badly hit by the shortening of the season, and some whom I have spoken to are so worried about the future that they are looking to buy into white fish quotas, which could be a very costly business. There was a glimmer of hope that the lost days at the start of the season might be reinstated at the end. That would have offered some protection for spring fish and moved towards compensating the netsmen for their lost catches at the start of the season; but as we know, that was not to be.

In a letter to me, the Parliamentary Secretary said that any extension would require an Environment Agency byelaw, and that that would take some time to achieve. It is obviously too late to do anything for this season, but I hope that I may take some encouragement from my hon. Friend's reply that he was unable to extend this year's season, because I hope that that means that there will be an early assessment of what will happen next year and in future years, so that anything that can be done will be done to protect the livelihood of the remaining netsmen. If that includes starting the season late, I hope that an extension will be granted. I also hope that that might be considered on a river by river basis.

I believe that the visit by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State was well received by the fishermen. I know that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, who has responsibility for fisheries, is highly regarded by fishermen in the north-east and I know that he has done all that he can to ensure that the netsmen are treated fairly, but the netsmen really need to know where they stand. If their income is to be further eroded, or if salmon net fishing is to be ended, the netsmen deserve to be compensated.

This should not be a battle between net and rod, or between the Environment Agency and fishermen. The aim should be to do all that we can to ensure a decent livelihood, and future, for everyone in our coastal communities.

1.44 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) on securing the debate and on the way in which he has made his case. I can confirm that, in his correspondence and his meeting with my colleagues at the Ministry, he has truly represented the interests of the fishermen of his constituency. I also appreciate the arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell).

Before I respond to the speeches, it might help to put the issue in context if I start by saying that I have been sympathetic to the north-east fishery. As a Government, we have never blamed the drift-net fishery for the decline in salmon stocks. There has been a decline for several

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

reasons. We have resisted what has at times been enormous pressure to close down that fishery; we know its cultural and historic role, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck outlined very well, and its important role in taking pressure off inshore stocks at certain times of the year.

However, I always told the rodsmen and the netsmen that we would proceed on the basis of science, and when we were under pressure to close down nets, I always said that if there was a scientific case to do so, we would consider it. As it happens, a clear scientific case has never been made for the closure of the north-east fishery. However, the case has undoubtedly been made for taking action to protect spring-running fish. Everyone, from all parts of the industry and the fishing sector, accepts that.

I always said that if there was evidence that action must be taken, we would take action; and that even if that involved tough decisions, we would take tough decisions on the basis of conservation. We have taken those decisions, and I believe that our decisions have been fair. I shall explain some of the background.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck asks how many officials in the Environment Agency hold rod licences. The answer is that I do not know; I am sure that some do, because angling is a popular sport. However, I believe that it would be wrong for the fishermen to suggest that there is bias in the Environment Agency simply because some of their staff may have an interest in rod fishing.

I also remind my hon. Friend and the fishermen whom he represents that, some years ago, the north-east salmon netting review was carried out. The Environment Agency was behind that review, and that review produced clear scientific arguments that the drift-nets were not having a detrimental effect on stocks. It would, therefore, be very unfair to suggest that the Environment Agency was biased in that respect. I do not accept that.

Mr. Beith: I accept some of what the Minister is saying, but he will recognise that the previous Government, despite receiving that evidence, went ahead and placed restrictions on salmon fishing which will eventually drive it out altogether. He must understand that the feeling of persecution on the part of fishermen dates primarily from that time, and that they look to him to do something to offset that and to give them a better future.

Mr. Morley: I do understand that point and I do understand how the fishermen feel about the matter. The right hon. Gentleman also spoke about cuts in grant in aid to the Environment Agency on the fishery side. It gave us no pleasure at all to take that decision. We did not want to take it; it was forced on us because of the state of the finances in the Department's budget. Several difficult decisions were taken; that was one of them. This afternoon, I shall meet the chairs of the regional fisheries committees to discuss that. The cut will not take place until the last year of the comprehensive spending review period—2001—which gives time to prepare. It also gives time because we shall start the review of the next CSR period. We shall start that review in 2000, before the cut comes in. It is an opportunity to look at the future budget and how we might deal with that issue.

This year, we have made available £500,000 extra in grant in aid to the Environment Agency for fisheries, especially in relation to enforcement of the measures, because we want them to work for the benefit of salmon conservation. That must be the key issue.

My hon. Friend rightly said that this was all about the pressure on the multi-sea winter salmon—the spring-running salmon—and the dramatic decline that has taken place in the north Atlantic in recent years. Last year, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea advised that stocks had fallen to unprecedentedly low levels, and that extreme caution should be exercised in their management. It recommended that the level of exploitation of MSW salmon be significantly reduced in 1999. Advice received this year from ICES has said that the situation has not improved. ICES believes that stocks of MSW salmon are now below safe biological limits. Our own scientific advisers have confirmed that those stocks, particularly of early-running spring salmon, are in decline throughout England and Wales. There are also problems in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck mentioned compensation. I do not want to duck the issue. Two aspects are relevant. The first is the cost of the licences issued to netsmen by the Environment Agency. They are entitled to make a case for a reduction in the cost of the licences because of the reduction in days, and it is for the Environment Agency, which administers the licences, to decide on that.

Secondly, there is a general issue of compensation. As a general principle, if the Government are introducing conservation measures to protect stocks, we do not believe that there is a justification for compensation. It is in the interests of those who will benefit from such conservation to take the necessary actions, even though I accept that in the short term, there may be a cost to carry. That is true in the case of commercial netsmen, and we understand their position.

We introduced a byelaw to postpone the start of the salmon netting season, to which my hon. Friend referred. That was part of a package of measures for conservation introduced by the Environment Agency and approved by me as a byelaw. The measures are designed to reduce the exploitation of spring salmon in England and Wales by both rods and nets.

We have tried to be fair. Although we allow the salmon netsmen to start on 1 June, the catch-and-release obligation does not end until 16 June. The purpose is not just to take the salmon off the netsmen to allow the rodsmen to catch them, but to give time for the salmon to get up the rivers to the spawning beds. It is a conservation measure, and is not intended to disadvantage one side or the other.

The consultation started in autumn 1998 and the measures were advertised in early November that year. All interested parties had an opportunity to put forward their views and to object to the proposals if they so wished. There were, indeed, a large number of objections. We held meetings, allowed people to state their case and listened carefully to their objections before we confirmed the byelaws. Some changes to the draft byelaws were made, in response to legitimate comments from various groups during the consultation.

Under the byelaws, the netting season is delayed until 1 June, catch-and-release is mandatory for salmon caught by anglers before 16 June, and the use of baits for salmon

is prohibited until the same date. The byelaws came into effect on 15 April 1999. As a result, no wild salmon can be caught and killed legally in England and Wales before 1 June.

As my hon. Friend said, although the netsmen started the season before the byelaws were introduced, it was well known that consultation was taking place and that byelaws were planned. I accept that, ideally, it would have been better to introduce the new measures before the opening of the drift-netting season, but unfortunately that was not possible because of the processes involved.

My hon. Friend argues for an extension of the season for 20 days. He is right to say that a further byelaw would be required to amend the existing one. The process is lengthy, necessitating further consultation.

I stress that any amendment must be based on the principle of salmon conservation. I shall not take steps that compromise existing measures. I give my hon. Friends an undertaking that I will raise the matter with the Environment Agency, and ask its advice about the implications of an extension towards the end of the season. I shall also consult the angling and fishing industries about that. I want that advice before I consider amending the measures that we have already taken.

I shall write to my hon. Friends with the views of the Environment Agency, and state whether I believe that there is a case to undertake the consultation that would follow if we decided to proceed. I emphasise that I will not do that if it compromises the existing measures. I understand that they are difficult for all sides, but they are in the interests of the fishery and for the benefit of the stock.

We have tried to be fair. For example, we have not restricted sea trout fishing, particularly in nets, from which the salmon can be released unharmed and the sea trout, which are not under threat, can be taken.

The north-east coast drift-net fishery is a mixed stock fishery, which exploits salmon from more than one river. Mixed stock fisheries present particular management problems, and as we have heard, they are being phased out. In addition, the advice of ICES is that particular caution is to be exercised in the management of fisheries that exploit multi-sea winter salmon. That is a further reason for not exempting that fishery from the measures that we have taken to conserve salmon.

It is true that in respect of salmon stocks, the north-east has not been as badly affected as some other parts of the country, but we must be cautious. Some of the salmon stocks in the River Tyne are improving from very low levels, owing primarily to industrial pollution. In 1976, the salmon rod catch in the River Tyne was in double figures only, whereas in 1997, it totalled almost 1,500.

I am sure that anglers and netsmen alike are delighted that salmon stocks on rivers in the north-east have increased so significantly in recent years, but I must caution them that recovery could conceal other adverse trends, because it is coming from such a low base. There is no evidence to support the thesis that the north-east has not been affected by the general decline in multi-sea winter salmon that is taking place throughout the north Atlantic. We support a river by river conservation management programme. That has been undertaken on many rivers and is proceeding well.

The shortening of the season does not seem to have had an adverse effect on catches in the north-east coast drift-net fishery. Even though the salmon netting season has been delayed until 1 June, provisional figures based on the netsmen's own returns suggest that catches of salmon and sea trout in that fishery increased substantially in 1999. Nearly 24,000 salmon and 15,000 sea trout were caught this year, compared to catches of 17,000 salmon and 11,000 sea trout in 1998. This year, even after the opening of the nets has been put back to 1 June, there has been an increase in catches of more than 30 per cent.

On Monday, I was speaking to a north-east salmon drift-net fisherman at sea about his season, which he confirmed had been a good one. Nevertheless, I confirm that I have a good deal of sympathy for the case made by my hon. Friend. I reiterate that I am willing to discuss with the Environment Agency an extension of 20 days, but I do not want to build up my hon. Friend's hopes, because my discussion with the Environment Agency will be based on the principle of salmon conservation management. I shall not undertake the consultation necessary for a new byelaw if it is not in the interests of the stock. That must be the bottom line.

My hon. Friend has presented a well-argued case on behalf of his fishermen. I shall reflect on it and take professional advice, and I shall be happy to write to him with my conclusions.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister was asked—

Special Advisers

1. **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): What controls there are on the number of special advisers. [96778]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam): Under the terms of the ministerial code, Cabinet Ministers may each appoint up to two special advisers. All appointments require the prior written approval of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Evans: First, I congratulate the Minister on her appointment and wish her well in her new post. As a priority, will she look at the number of special advisers, which has grown dramatically under the Government, particularly in the Prime Minister's office? Under the previous Conservative Government there were eight in that office; now there are 21. Does she agree that it is inappropriate for those special advisers to take over the role formerly filled by politically neutral civil servants? Does she not think that their number and powers should be reduced? Have not a cadre of Labour placemen and spin doctors been appointed—funded by the taxpayer—so that they can spin the Labour mantra up to and including the next general election?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I have obviously looked carefully at that issue, because this is not the first time that he has raised it. No. 10 has never hidden the number of advisers it has or the amount of money that they get paid. We made it very clear, in opposition through to taking office, that we wanted advisers in No. 10, together with Ministers, to drive policy forward. We have never denied that we wanted a central force to help to push things through. My special advisers—in Northern Ireland and in the Cabinet Office—work hand in hand with the civil service. They have different functions and different jobs, but it is useful when they work together.

Mr. Hilary Benn (Leeds, Central): I also welcome my right hon. Friend to her new post. I should perhaps declare an interest, as I am a former special adviser. Does she agree that it is about time that the Opposition recognised that, under the previous Government, special advisers worked with Ministers to help them to achieve their objectives and that the same is true of the advisers working under the current Administration? The only difference is that the current advisers are rather more effective than their predecessors.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome. I agree that our advisers are more effective and I find the two who work with me very useful. They do not spin, as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said, but do what they did for us in opposition—work on the political aspects of policy, which is not the job of many of the civil servants.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I, too, welcome the Minister to her new post and I hope that it will prove to be as absorbing, though perhaps not as dangerous, as her previous one.

In answer to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Benn), the Minister suggested that there has been no change in the role of special advisers. Will she look again at the terms of appointment? They deliberately excluded an important criterion after May 1997. She will know that up to that date special advisers were told to avoid

"activities likely to give rise to criticism that"

they

"are being employed at public expense for purely party political purposes".

That was removed from the new letters of appointment. Will she reinstate that requirement?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. I am sure that my present job will be as absorbing as my previous one; it may even be as dangerous, in some ways, as I try to work across Departments and get Ministers to co-operate. I shall certainly look at the guidelines again but, having read carefully through the code and considered what special advisers have done, I do not necessarily see any contradictions or detect any fears about the missing words, although there may be some in his mind.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): If special advisers keep Ministers in touch, let us have more. I believe that that is what the public would say as well.

Marjorie Mowlam: There is no doubt that many of us are kept in touch when we go home to our constituencies, and kept in touch by our constituency offices. There is also no doubt that the more people we talk to and mix with who are of different political persuasions, or from different backgrounds, the better: that can only be of use.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Let me take this opportunity to welcome not only the Minister for the Cabinet Office but the entire Cabinet Office ministerial team. I think that the entire team has changed since we last met for Cabinet Office questions. No doubt the right hon. Lady's experience at the Northern Ireland Office will help her to reconcile the warring factions in the Cabinet.

This first question is important. It is important for the right hon. Lady to show how she can root out the culture of cronyism that has found its way into Government. In particular, will she enlighten us about paragraph 48 of the ministerial code of conduct, which provides that there should be only two special advisers per Cabinet Minister? In how many Departments is that limit being breached? Will she also tell us why it is now necessary for special advisers to travel abroad with their Ministers? I am talking about 360 trips abroad, which have cost more than £500,000 in the last year.

Marjorie Mowlam: Accusations of cronyism should be viewed in the light of what happened when the

hon. Gentleman's party was in government. I merely say that people in glass houses should not throw enormous great boulders.

I believe that a couple of Departments have more than two advisers. The rules permit that if it is okayed by the Prime Minister, and that has happened. I understand that the Cabinet Minister involved and the relevant permanent secretary must decide whether special advisers travel abroad. If the hon. Gentleman can give examples of cases in which that has not been agreed, I should like to know about them.

Drug Misuse

2. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): What discussions she has held with the anti-drugs co-ordinator on the use of harm-reduction approaches to tackling drug misuse. [96780]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam): I hold regular discussions with the anti-drugs co-ordinator on all aspects of our anti-drugs policy, including the use of harm reduction programmes.

Shona McIsaac: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the case of 13-year-old Leah Lawson, a Grimsby schoolgirl who died earlier this year after purchasing £10 worth of prescribed methadone? To staunch the supply of prescribed methadone on the streets, will she and the anti-drugs co-ordinator, and any other Ministers involved, consider allowing its prescription only in small amounts, and encouraging addicts to take it only on the premises?

Marjorie Mowlam: I am aware of the case of Leah Lawson—an appalling tragedy: the loss of another young life owing to drugs—and of the pain that losing her when she was so young will have caused her family and friends. Clinical guidelines were drawn up in April for doctors dealing with drug misuse, which recommend more supervised consumption. As for my hon. Friend's specific point about small amounts and methadone being taken on doctors' premises, I will certainly take it up with the Department of Health.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): The right hon. Lady will have noticed that no fewer than six of the 26 questions tabled for today relate to drugs and their misuse. Given that prevention is better than cure, and given that the right hon. Lady is the Minister for joined-up government, will she have a word with the Secretary of State for Defence, in order to ensure that the defence commitment to stopping the flow of drugs into the western world—I refer to both troops on the ground and naval patrols—is not reduced? According to a report from the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen), naval patrols in the Virgin Islands have been reduced. I think that that gives all the wrong messages to our allies in the fight against the importation of drugs. Will the right hon. Lady pass on the necessary message?

Marjorie Mowlam: It surely comes as no surprise that six out of 26 questions should be about drugs. The issue worries every Member who notes the increase in drug use and misuse of, particularly, cocaine and heroin, which destroy lives, families and communities. No one denies that it is important.

My friend Keith Hellawell, the anti-drugs co-ordinator, who does a lot of work on drugs for the Government, last week met General McCaffrey from the United States, who was on his way back from Turkey. The work across Governments to try to stem the arrival of drugs is continuing apace. I will certainly pass the hon. Gentleman's comments to the Ministry of Defence if it has not already heard his views, but I assure him that we are already concentrating on preventing the problem by stopping drugs from entering the country in the first place.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): May I welcome my right hon. Friend to her post as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster? I trust that we can look forward to her visiting the city soon, where she will receive an extremely warm welcome.

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the pioneering work by nurses who are employed by the Morecambe Bay community NHS trust in Lancaster? It has seconded nurses to police stations to deal with people with drug problems at crucial times in their lives and at moments when interventions might prove particularly successful. That pioneering initiative received a Queen's nursing award only last week.

Marjorie Mowlam: During my first visit to Lancaster in the early new year I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend and his colleagues, as well as others in the Duchy.

I add my congratulations to the nurses on the award that they received. It is in the police stations that the problems first come to people's notice. We have to be sure that, when young people come out of jail, there are suitable alternatives and help is given to them, so that they do not just return to drugs and go back to jail. The work in police stations by nurses, social workers, probation officers and others is crucial, as is that done on all the other fronts where we have to fight the problem. The battle is not just on one front; it is about stopping drugs coming in, doing all that we can to prevent people from starting drugs and, once they are on them, getting them off them.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I, too, wish the right hon. Lady well in her new position as Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Recently, the Home Secretary announced that he wanted mandatory testing of all arrestees for drugs without first consulting those who would have to apply that test. Police officers have warned that the plan is financially and legally unrealistic. Was the Minister consulted in advance about the proposal, as one would expect from so-called joined-up government, or is it a further example of muddle and incompetence by Ministers at the Home Office?

Marjorie Mowlam: I was not in post when the proposal was first considered; whether my predecessor was consulted, I cannot say. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but it had already been proposed because, when I read all the papers that had been given to me, it was already in them. Therefore, I was not consulted, but I am sure that my predecessor was.

The drug treatment and testing order is important. As I said earlier, we must do the work to begin with to ensure that people who are on drugs get off them as quickly as possible. It is a crucial initiative.

Drug Misuse

3. **Mr. Don Touhig** (Islwyn): If she will make a statement on progress towards achieving the Government's targets on combating drug misuse. [96781]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Ian McCartney): I am pleased to inform my hon. Friend that the Government are making good progress in meeting the targets that are outlined in their drugs strategy. For example, we have introduced the confiscated assets fund to channel money that is seized from drug traffickers back into anti-drug activity, and launched the arrest referral challenge scheme, which will provide a further £20 million over the next three years to get drug misusers into treatment. *The Independent* reported that drug addiction is a chronic, relapsing condition. We need to do all we can to deal with it.

Mr. Touhig: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new position and wish him well. I thank him for answering my question.

Statistics show that one third of all property crime in Britain is drugs related. How will the Government strategy impact on that?

Mr. McCartney: I thank my hon. Friend for his best wishes.

The Government have set tough targets, short, medium and long term, and all Government Departments are bound by them. We must start at base camp. We must reduce the number of young people who are using heroin and cocaine. We want to reduce that number by one quarter, by 2005, and by 50 per cent., by 2008; and to reduce the level of re-offending by drugs misusers by 25 per cent., by 2005, and by 50 per cent., by 2008.

We have set ourselves those tough targets because, as I said, drug misuse is a chronic and relapsing condition. Consequently, great resources must be provided to enable individuals to deal with their own particular circumstances—their self-confidence, self-awareness and self-worth—and a range of measures must be introduced to enable people who have completed a drug misuse programme to be sure that their drug misuse has ended and that a new life is before them.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Has the right hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to read the British crime survey, which was published at the beginning of September? Does he agree with me that Mr. Hellawell was complacent in his response to that crime survey—which showed that half of all young people have used drugs, and that some drug use was increasing—when he said that he and the Government were on course to deal with drugs use?

We subscribe to the view that tough, challenging targets have been set, but none of the targets apply, or may be measured, before 2005. What action is being taken now to achieve them? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we should not think that setting targets is an achievement in itself?

Mr. McCartney: I disagree profoundly with the hon. Gentleman's comments about Mr. Hellawell and the Government. Perhaps I should remind him that, for 10 years, Conservative Members who served as Home Office Ministers, for example, refused to co-ordinate and regulate the security industry, in which front organisations were established to distribute and sell drugs in clubs across Britain. Consequently, at the end of this decade, not one club or pub in Britain is not at risk of drugs being sold in them, and young people who go to those clubs and pubs run the risk of drugs misuse.

We have come a long way, but we need to go further in dealing with Conservative Members' 10 years of inaction in government. That inaction put a whole generation of young people at risk from those who would sell them drugs on the streets, in pubs and clubs, and in school playgrounds. Although we have made a start, we need to do better, and there is a long way to go. We should do everything that we can to save every single life, because every life saved will mean saving one more family the trauma of losing a young person, and those young people will be able to fulfil their dreams, rather than dying before reaching maturity.

The Government are in no circumstances complacent about drug misuse, and I hope that there will be all-party consensus on dealing with it. The issue is difficult and complex, and addressing it will involve communities, individual and families. We have to do everything possible to challenge drug traffickers and to get them out of our society. We must also invest in dealing with young people who have fallen into drug misuse and cannot get out of that trap, and we must co-operate across communities, to rid them of the drugs scourge. If we take that action together—rather than making ping-pong points—we could save more young people.

Regulatory Impact Unit

4. **Ms Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): If she will make a statement on the work of the regulatory impact unit. [96783]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Graham Stringer): I thank the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) for his earlier welcoming remarks.

The regulatory impact unit helps the Government to find the right balance between proper standards of protection and unnecessary impact on business. It scrutinises proposed regulation to ensure that it has been properly assessed and identifies spheres in which existing regulation is unnecessary or needs simplification.

Ms Lawrence: That response will be welcomed by small businesses in my community for which regulation is a very important issue. Does my hon. Friend accept that small firms in particular are often at a competitive disadvantage because of the disproportionate cost and

time involved in their complying with regulations? Does he accept that that fact reinforces the need for the Government to regulate only when absolutely necessary?

Mr. Stringer: I certainly accept my hon. Friend's point, which is why we are setting up the Small Business Service to provide user friendly advice and support. The regulatory impact unit will work alongside the service to tackle the pressures facing small businesses. We are concerned that they should not suffer disproportionately from red tape. That is why regulatory impact assessment requires Departments to think about the particular problems facing small businesses, using a small firms litmus test.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Last Friday, I was at a meeting of the North and Mid-Cheshire chamber of commerce, where about 100 small and medium-sized businesses were represented. We discussed the 1998-99 annual report of the Better Regulation Task Force, which was distributed by the Minister's predecessor the day before he left office. Consternation was expressed at the costs that such businesses are having to bear. The representatives asked whether it might be sensible to rechristen the organisation the deregulation task force, not the Better Regulation Task Force, to show a commitment to removing the regulations and costs on their businesses.

Mr. Stringer: The most important thing about regulation is getting it right. The previous Administration were obsessed with numbers and did not get the balance right with better regulation and benefits outweighing the disbenefits. What is also important is that the Government are committed to minimising the extra costs to employers and creating a climate in which enterprise can thrive. That is why we have lowered the tax rate for small companies twice since May 1997 and abolished advance corporation tax, creating a £1 billion cash flow advantage to companies in general. The hon. Gentleman has to judge regulation and improvements to it according to the overall context of the business environment.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): To develop the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Ms Lawrence), will my hon. Friend the Minister focus on the needs of micro-enterprises? There are hundreds of thousands of such sole traders, who are grappling with the burden of bumph and the other overheads that are the bequest of the past 18 years. Will he consider their interests as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Stringer: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and remind him that during the previous Administration a small business went to the wall every three minutes. That is why we are going to ensure that the regulatory impact unit looks into all regulation and that the benefits outweigh the disbenefits.

Civil Service

5. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** (South-West Surrey): What steps she is taking to promote public confidence in the independence and political impartiality of the civil service. [96784]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam): The Government are committed to maintaining a permanent and impartial civil service and to upholding the principles of integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity set out in the civil service code. That commitment is reinforced in the ministerial code.

Mrs. Bottomley: I join those who have welcomed the right hon. Lady to her new job. Will she look again at the remarks of the head of professions of the Government Information and Communication Service, who told the Neill committee that career civil servants were feeling vulnerable under the Government, who are obsessed with presentation?

A growing number of people with Labour party histories have moved into the career civil service. The right hon. Lady has spoken much of the importance of special advisers. The Labour party also frequently refers to the previous Conservative Administration. Can she find one example of someone who worked in the Conservative party press office who was then taken on as a civil service press officer?

Marjorie Mowlam: I have looked into the matter, as this is not the first time that the right hon. Lady has raised it. Yes, there have been a great number of changes among press officers, and when one looks at the detail, one finds that there were not as many under the previous Government, but many press officers have retired or moved with their Minister. When one studies individual cases, however, one finds that the situation is not as odd and bizarre as Opposition Members have tried to portray it. The appointments have been open and have been made on the grounds of merit. Those are the criteria that have been followed. If the right hon. Lady informs me of specific cases of concern, I will look into them. In all the months that this question has been asked, however, there has not been one such case.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wonder whether I could introduce a bit of balance. Is my right hon. Friend aware that I think that some special advisers are not socialist enough? I want somebody who is totally and utterly dedicated to the cause; somebody who wants to redistribute power and wealth and will advise the Chancellor of the Exchequer for next year as well; somebody who is dedicated to saving the coal industry and taking it away from the grasp of Richard Budge. I have the names of a few redundant miners who could fit the bill.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. If the people he is thinking of would like to put their names forward as special advisers to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, I am sure that they would be considered.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The civil service code is clear. It says that the Government have a

"duty not to use public resources for party political purposes"

and

"to uphold the political impartiality of the civil service."

Can the right hon. Lady confirm that the Government have done that at all times?

Marjorie Mowlam: I do not have any doubt that that is the case. Let us be clear about the specifics that other Governments have adopted. When you were in government before us—*[Interruption.]* I beg your pardon Madam Speaker. When the Conservatives were in government, there were three or four Ministers who did campaigning work for the party. The situation is not unique to this Government. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I think that the impartiality of the civil service is crucial to good government. We are proud to work with an impartial civil service.

Countryside Policy

6. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What proposals she has to develop a cross-departmental policy for the countryside. [96785]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced today that I am to chair a new Cabinet Committee to co-ordinate the Government's policies affecting rural areas, although my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will take the lead on the rural White Paper.

Mr. Quinn: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her new place on the Front Bench and on being appointed to chair that important Committee. Many of my rural constituents believe that we need to move forward from joined-up thinking to the joined-up action that I am confident that my right hon. Friend will promote on her vital new Committee.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. The Committee had its first meeting this morning. Joined-up government is beginning to work well. I assure him that we shall reverse the legacy left to us by the Tory Government. To see how they destroyed rural communities we only have to look at bus services. Before we came to power, only one parish in four had any bus services. With the money that we have put into local bus services, that situation is beginning to change. As our integrated transport policy moves forward in January, there will be further change. We have given incentives to many of the post offices and small shops that would have closed, like many before them under the previous Administration, to protect the sense of community in rural areas that focuses on local post offices.

Those are two good examples of Tory neglect. One final difference between us and the previous Administration is shown by the fact that between 1983 and 1997 they closed 30 small schools a year. We have given help so that small schools in rural areas not only survive, but have their standards protected.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Now that she is in her new post, will the right hon. Lady do something about the extraordinary situation relating to fox hunting? The Home Office has suggested that we are going to do away with it, while the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has suggested to farmers that the best way to get rid of fallen stock is to call in the hunt to deal with the situation. Surely that is an excellent example of how joined up the Government are not.

Marjorie Mowlam: Back in November 1997, the House of Commons voted overwhelmingly in favour of a ban, but the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) ran out of time. Ministers are now actively considering ways of taking the matter forward, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be making an announcement shortly.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Single Currency

Q1. [96808] **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What factors other than economic ones will determine whether Britain joins the single European currency.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): A decision will be taken on the basis of what is in Britain's best national interests.

Dr. Lewis: Why does not the Prime Minister break the habit of a lifetime and answer a question that has been put to him? His office has known for almost a fortnight that this was a question about the political factors that should be counted in deciding whether Britain should join the single currency. Is it not a fact that the President of the European Commission has stated that the European Commission should be described in future as the European Government, and that the president of the European central bank has stated that the purpose of European monetary union is, and always has been, to be a stepping stone on the way to a united Europe? Does the Prime Minister agree with those aims? Before he denounces us as minority—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will have some order in the House.

Dr. Lewis: Before the Prime Minister denounces us, as he always does, as minority extremists, will he explain why 64 per cent. of the British people believe that we should keep the pound and reject the single European currency?

The Prime Minister: I thought that I was coming in on the hon. Gentleman's Conservative party reselection speech.

The national interest of course includes the economic conditions that we have set out, but, unlike the Conservative party, we believe that the national economic interest should be the determining factor in whether Britain joins the single currency—whether it is good for British jobs, industry and investment. But the hon. Gentleman's position is that we should never join the single currency—not in any circumstances. Indeed, he is a member of a Conservative party fringe group with 13 Conservative spokesmen and spokeswomen who believe that, if they cannot renegotiate the terms of entry

to the Common Market, they should withdraw from the European Community. That is the hon. Gentleman's policy, it is not ours, so we just disagree. What is absurd is for the leader of the Conservative party to say that he is fighting a great campaign to save the pound, but only for five years. That is not the hon. Gentleman's policy. Our policy is the sensible one—leave the option open and determine it on the British national economic interest.

Engagements

Q2. [96809] **Mr. Don Touhig** (Islwyn): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 10 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. Later today, I shall have further such meetings.

Mr. Touhig: The Tory party destroyed the great industries of Wales, especially coal, which we debated in the Chamber this morning. It never reinvested in reskilling our work force, and it left us a legacy of despair without so much as a second thought. *[Interruption.]* However, my valleys are beginning to bloom again with unemployment falling, new job opportunities being created and confidence in the economy.

Will my right hon. Friend accept from me that one of the Government's great successes has been the new deal? It has offered hope to a generation that had none before. To abolish the new deal, as advocated by the Conservative party, would be the greatest of betrayals.

The Prime Minister: At the beginning of my hon. Friend's question, Conservative Members were shouting that I was not responsible for the dereliction of industry under the Tories. That is dead right. I am not responsible. They were responsible for what they did.

Of course, my hon. Friend is right. The new deal is a vital part of giving hope and opportunity to people who have been denied it. It provides jobs and hope for the young and long-term unemployed, but it is opposed by the Tory party. The minimum wage tackles poverty pay, but is opposed by the Tory party. The working families tax credit helps low-income families, but is opposed by the Tory party. Bank of England independence gives stability in the economy, but it is opposed by the Tory party. If any of those points is unfair, when the Leader of the Opposition gets up, he can tell us.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Is not this morning's refusal by the French Cabinet to lift the beef ban a total humiliation for this spineless Government and this hopeless Agriculture Minister, who said in November that it would be lifted in the spring; in July that it would be lifted in August; and, last Tuesday, that it would be lifted tomorrow? Does not the Prime Minister now need a different policy and a different Minister? Does he still regard the principal achievement of his European policy to be the lifting of the beef ban?

The Prime Minister: The Conservatives do not want to get on to the economy, do they?

The sensible position to take on the beef ban is to take the French to court if they are unreasonable or do not accept what we have put before them. However, it is obviously preferable for us to persuade them to lift their ban, which is why we have met with them and will have a further meeting. If they do not agree, we will take them to court. The only reason we got the beef ban lifted was because this Government came in and cleaned up the mess left by the Conservative Government.

Mr. Hague: The French Cabinet has decided this morning not to lift the beef ban. The Prime Minister said in July that the beef ban had been lifted only because of the Government's constructive attitude to Europe. He said:

> "That is why we got the beef ban lifted, and it is another example of new Labour working."

Is not this an all too devastating example of new Labour working? Is it not the case that, on Monday, he gave the French the third way and, on Wednesday, they gave him the two fingers? Is not it time to lift our own ban on beef on the bone? Is not it time for the Prime Minister to get himself an Agriculture Minister who actually speaks to his counterparts? Will the right hon. Gentleman stop caving in and start standing up for this country?

The Prime Minister: The sensible way to proceed is to take the French to court, which we are able to do and will do if they do not agree with the scientific evidence, because the law, the science and the evidence are all on our side. However, it all depends on the objective. If the objective is to use this issue as the latest reason to whip up antagonism towards Europe—as it is for the Conservative party—fine. However, if the objective is to sell beef, the sensible thing is to persuade the French. If not, we take them to law. The alternative that the right hon. Gentleman and his shadow Minister have been pressing on me for the past few weeks—a trade war with France—would be totally disastrous. It would put thousands of British workers out of work, and it would not result in any British beef being sold. The sensible thing is to persuade and, if we cannot, to use the law, which we are—as a result of this Government's endeavours—now entitled to do.

Q3. [96810] **Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister accept that the most important test by which his Government should be judged is how they tackle child poverty? Does he agree that the best way of doing that is by unifying the tax and benefits structure, as the Chancellor proposed yesterday, so as to deliver a single weekly payment of child credit directly into the hands of the mother? Does he agree that it would bring hope to the four out of every 10 children in this country who were born into poverty after almost 20 years of Conservative Government?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that it is right to proceed with the policies of increasing child benefit—which is very important—and putting in place the sure start scheme for better child care facilities and help for families. The working families tax credit will lift the incomes of low-income families substantially, and some 2 million families in Britain will gain. It is appalling that the Conservative party is now proposing to scrap each one

of those measures that help Britain's children. We have lifted 1 million children out of poverty, and we will now proceed to carry out the rest of our pledge.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Does the Prime Minister agree, on a day on which he and many hon. Members of all parties have been meeting and congratulating the outstanding recipients of the annual disabled awards, that it is ironic, and somewhat tragic, that the Chancellor yesterday announced another tax break for entrepreneurs while Labour Members were being whipped through the Lobby to impose a benefit cut on the disabled? When he looks at the juxtaposition of those two events yesterday, which does he take more pride in: the tax break for the wealthy few or the benefit cut for the disabled many?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let us deal with the facts. Not a single existing benefit recipient is receiving a benefit cut. That campaign of the Liberal Democrats is just rubbish, and no one should be told that they are having their benefit cut when they are not. The second point is this—we are actually going to get more help to those who are severely disabled, including more than £25 a week to some of the people most severely disabled. The third point is that yes, we are reforming the welfare state, and in particular, we are reforming incapacity benefit. That is for a very simple reason. Over the last 20 years, the number of recipients of incapacity benefit has trebled. There are now more people claiming incapacity benefit than claiming unemployment benefit. That situation cannot possibly be sustained. What is important in the welfare state is that we help people into work who can work and give proper security to those who cannot. As a result of our measures, those who are severely disabled and the genuinely disabled will benefit, but we will not have the system abused.

Mr. Kennedy: That is not how Labour put it in opposition. That was not the rhetoric then. The right hon. Gentleman's own figures revealed yesterday that there is a £7 billion underspend in the social security budget, yet he is giving the poorest pensioners only 75p more. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not true.] I appreciate the scale of the embarrassment on the Labour Back Benches; methinks they do protest too much. What will all the money accumulating to the Chancellor be spent on? Is not the growing suspicion that it is going to be used for pre-election tax bribes?

The Prime Minister: First, in respect of the money that has been saved on social security, the vast bulk is the result, I am pleased to say, of falling unemployment, and of the new deal, which the Liberal Democrats opposed. *[Interruption.]* They did, I am afraid. Put it like this: they opposed the way that we raised the money for it, but even they must surely now know that if we do not get the money in, we cannot spend it on the things that we need. The second point on disability is that in this Parliament we are actually spending £2 billion more on the disabled—but we are reforming the welfare state because it needs reform. That is not a promise broken, it is a promise fulfilled. We said before we were elected that we would reform welfare. Indeed, many people said that we would never dare do it, but we did.

The purpose of reform is to get the help to people who really need it. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) can point to whatever he wants, but what I am telling him is that the important thing for the country is that we manage to get help to people who really need it. That is why we have got the £2 billion extra to the disabled, the £6 billion extra to children and the biggest ever programme for the young and long-term unemployed that this country has ever seen. I think that that is the way to reform the welfare state. As for pensioners, we are giving them the £100 allowance—we have now said that we will pay it every year—the free television licence for those over 75, the free eye tests and the minimum income guarantee. If the right hon. Gentleman is talking about manifestos, when we compare what we have done with what the Liberal Democrats promised, it shows that we are the people who are more generous, but we are acting in a way that is compatible with sound and sensible public finance.

Q4. [96811] **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that yesterday's pre-Budget report will lead to genuine consultation in the run-up to the Budget next March? In the light of that, will he ensure that the Treasury's computer model is made available to the Leader of the Opposition, so that he can analyse the Conservative party's tax and spend proposals, especially the £10 billion hole in the public finances that would result if those proposals were implemented? My constituents are sick and tired of politicians such as the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats, who constantly say that they support increased expenditure at the same time as they support cuts in taxation. That is dishonest politics and we should reject it.

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend says, the Conservative party's spending proposals would result in a £10 billion black hole. In the past few days, Conservative Members have tabled amendments worth £4 billion in extra social security spending, yet Front Benchers tour the country telling everyone how they will slash social security bills. Their sums simply do not add up, except in one set of circumstances, which is where they slash spending on schools, hospitals, the police and transport. The Conservatives have never yet given a coherent account of how they would boost spending, boost social security spending and cut taxes at the same time—perhaps we shall hear one.

Q5. [96812] **Dr. Michael Clark** (Rayleigh): Was the Prime Minister pleased to learn from Lord Levene that the City of London is doing extremely well, despite being outside the euro zone, or possibly because it is outside the euro zone? Does he agree that, ever since Britain's exit from the exchange rate mechanism, Britain's economy has done extremely well and has outperformed most economies in the European Union? Is it not a question of the longer we wait, the more we see?

The Prime Minister: I think that Lord Levene was saying how well the City was doing under a Labour Government, and I was delighted to hear it. In fact, just as he praised the Labour Government, I believe that he attacked the previous Conservative Government in respect of the exchange rate mechanism—[HON. MEMBERS:

"You voted for it."] Come, come—calm down. I know that Conservative Members do not like to be reminded of such things. Lord Levene was speaking a lot of sense when he said that it was important for us to keep the option open, which is precisely what we are doing. It would be a disaster—I think Lord Levene said this in his interviews—if we ended up ruling out the euro for ever, or ruled it out for some arbitrary period of time, because that would damage Britain's standing, damage our influence, and damage our ability to decide to join the euro if it were in our interests to do so.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): Has my right hon. Friend been following the case of Mr. Jeff McWhinney, chief executive of the British Deaf Association? This week, along with many thousands of profoundly deaf people in this country, Mr. McWhinney was told that he could not participate in jury service, simply because the law does not allow a 13th person—a sign language interpreter—into the jury room. Will my right hon. Friend liaise with the Lord Chancellor to ensure that that unnecessary discriminatory practice will be challenged and corrected at the earliest opportunity?

The Prime Minister: I understand the concern that prompts my hon. Friend's question. The Home Secretary informs me that we are reviewing the rules on that matter, because it should be possible for all people to take part in jury service. Jury service is a great public service and we should do all we can to encourage people to participate in it.

Q6. [96813] **Mr. John M. Taylor** (Solihull): Does the Prime Minister think that candidates for mayor of London should be chosen on the widest possible franchise within their own party, or is he too scared that the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) will get the Labour nomination?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to say that whoever is the Labour candidate for mayor of London will be better than the Tory candidate.

Q7. [96814] **Mr. Peter Bradley** (The Wrekin): The announcement of the establishment of a Cabinet Committee on rural affairs is welcome to my constituents and to bodies that represent rural and countryside organisations. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with 180 Labour Members of Parliament representing rural seats, we can claim to represent rural England just as much as we represent urban Britain? Will he repudiate Conservative policies that spell no change for the countryside, which demonstrates that the Conservatives did not listen when they were in government and do not speak for the countryside in opposition? Does my right hon. Friend accept that the real issues confronting people in rural Britain are the need for change, for affordable housing, decent jobs and proper public transport? That is rural Britain's agenda. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is also the agenda of the Labour Government?

The Prime Minister: Before they left office, the previous Government released some 1,200 hectares of greenbelt land for development and they allowed six out of 10 new homes to be built on greenfield sites. Whatever they may claim to want now, it is certainly not what they did in Government.

We are spending almost £200 million more on rural bus services and giving £500 million extra to shire counties to enable them to raise education standards. Everyone—whether in the country, the town or city—benefits from policies such as the new deal and the working families tax credit. People benefit from Bank of England independence for a more stable economy and from the rise in child benefit. The Conservative party would scrap all those policies.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): As the Chancellor strangely neglected to mention some of next year's biggest tax increases in his so-called pre-Budget report, will the Prime Minister tell us how many people retiring next year will pay more tax as a result of the abolition of pensioners' married tax allowance?

The Prime Minister: We are cutting taxes. The right hon. Gentleman may not like it, but, if he looks at the figures, he will see that we are cutting taxes. The measures for pensioners that we announced yesterday will cut taxes.

Mr. Hague: It is no good the Chancellor whispering to the Prime Minister about stealth taxes now: he should have informed his right hon. Friend of them before. Does it not reveal a lot about the standards of truthfulness and honesty in this Government that the biggest tax increase in next year's Budget was not even mentioned by the Chancellor yesterday? Is it not true that even the Prime Minister will find it difficult to twist, distort and disguise the fact that hundreds of thousands of people who reach 65 next year will pay up to £500 a year more in tax—which more than cancels out anything that the Chancellor announced yesterday? Will the Prime Minister confirm that that £500 figure is correct?

The Prime Minister: No, because it is not. The married couples allowance has been retained for pensioners. As a result of all the changes we have made—particularly taking pensioners out of tax—people in this country will be better off. As a result of our plans—in particular, the direct tax cut—the average tax burden on the average family will fall next year to its lowest level ever. If the right hon. Gentleman is saying that he intends to reverse the changes that we have made, perhaps he will explain now where the money will come from.

Mr. Hague: Has the Chancellor not told the Prime Minister that the married couples allowance will be phased out for people who become pensioners after next April? Perhaps he should whisper that to the Prime Minister. I do not know what the Chancellor told the Prime Minister earlier, but, in the knowledge economy, if one puts garbage in, one gets garbage out—as illustrated by the previous answer.

As the Prime Minister does not want to tell the truth about pensioners, I will ask him about charities. Will he confirm that the relief on charitable giving announced by the Chancellor is more than cancelled out by the

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£400 million in extra tax that charities will have to pay as a result of the loss of dividend tax credits—another stealth tax that is now in place?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong on that point also. The Charities Aid Foundation welcomed the measures that the Chancellor announced yesterday—and they are not the only changes. Corporation tax, income tax and small business tax have been cut, and there is a 10p starting rate. We have introduced the working families tax credit and reduced capital gains tax. More than any of those things, as a result of running a stable, steady economy, people's living standards are rising. If we went down the right hon. Gentleman's path—which involves top-rate tax cuts for a few and tax cut plans that he could not possibly pay for—we would return to the boom and bust of the late 1980s.

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister's officials and the Chancellor should have given him the full quotation, because the National Council for Voluntary Organisations gave a cautious welcome to the Chancellor's announcement and said that it would not fully compensate for the abolition of advance corporation tax relief. Once again, we have garbage in and garbage out.

The independent figures from the House of Commons Library, which are available today, show that the tax burden is higher now than at the last election, will be higher next year than this year, and will be higher the year after that. The Government make announcements for pensioners and then hit people who will be retiring next year with £500 more tax. They pose as the friend of charities and then are happy to raid their collection tins. Are not people sickened by the sight of a Prime Minister who will not give straight answers on tax the day after a Budget announcement, and is not that the new corruption of politics in this country?

The Prime Minister: First, let me give the right hon. Gentleman the facts from the Treasury report. The tax burden will fall next year and the year after. What is more, I have done a comparison with the spending and tax plans in the Conservatives' last Budget. *[Interruption.]* Well, the right hon. Gentleman was a member of that Cabinet, so I think that I am entitled to mention the plans. The comparison shows that the tax burden next year and the year after under the Labour party will be less than it would have been under Tory spending plans.

Mr. Hague *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but I have the figures here which show that the tax burden will be less. Under the Tory plans, the tax burden would have been 37.1 per cent. next year and then 37.6 per cent. Under our plans, the figures are 37 per cent. and 36.8 per cent., so the right hon. Gentleman is wrong on that.

More than that, what the right hon. Gentleman is now advocating through his policies is spending plans that cannot possibly be paid for. He has now put in place his tax guarantee, which cannot possibly work unless there are massive public spending cuts. Hon. Members should not take my word for it. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is still, I think, a member of the shadow Cabinet. He is one of the gang running the Tory show nowadays. A few weeks ago, he said:

"Labour's big mistake was to announce huge increases in public spending."

Was it? He continued:

"The Opposition recommends reducing future spending plans."

Do they? *[Interruption.]* One of them shouts out "welfare". Right, they are going to cut welfare.

I shall be generous. I shall leave aside the fact that in the past few days the Opposition have announced £4 billion of extra social security spending. They say that they oppose our extra welfare spending. *[Interruption.]* Let us have a little bit of quiet. Which spending plans do they oppose? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall have order in this House—on all sides of the House, including the Opposition Front Bench. I am deafened by noise here, and I want no more of it.

The Prime Minister: Do the Opposition oppose the working families tax credit? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Do they oppose child benefit? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Do they oppose the extra money for pensioners? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Do they oppose the new deal? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Well, that is what the country would get if it ever voted Tory again.

Q8. [96815] **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Cambridge university on its exciting new venture with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the institute of entrepreneurship? Does he agree that the generous Government financial contribution to the venture shows that this Government are keen to promote competitiveness and productivity in the new knowledge-based industries of the future?

The Prime Minister: The venture between MIT and Cambridge university is immensely exciting. I pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for having put it together. The venture will serve all the regions of the country, and it comes on top of the largest increase that we have ever seen in investment in Britain's science base. Many of the new companies will be the direct result of the collaboration between those two institutions. It is a very great thing for them to have decided that Britain is the place to base MIT.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, quoted what he had said on 14 July last year. He said:

"The Chancellor hopes that we will oppose his plans to spend more money on health and education, but I am going to disappoint him . . . we welcome . . . money for those priority services."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 195-96.]

He continued:

"I said that last year and I say it again today. We support increases in health and education spending."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1999; Vol. 337, c. 893.]

Twice in the following column of *Hansard*—column 894—the Chancellor said that the shadow Chancellor had just told us that he opposed the extra spending on health and education last year. The Chancellor repeated that in column 905. In this House, we are properly prevented from calling anyone a liar—nor would I ever so call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom I greatly respect. However, there is an Alice in Wonderland dimension to those exchanges—*[Interruption.]*—

Madam Speaker: Order. Just a moment, Mr. Brooke. I will hear out this point of order properly.

Mr. Brooke: There is an Alice in Wonderland dimension to the exchanges, if the Chancellor of the Exchequer can say not once but four times the precise opposite of what the shadow Chancellor has just said. The remarks of both right hon. Gentlemen are recorded in yesterday's *Hansard*. Can you advise us, Madam Speaker, as to the best way of dealing with this matter? It is patently one of fact—not of debate.

Madam Speaker: As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, I cannot comment on the utterances of right hon. or hon. Members. I have no responsibility for what any of them say—providing that it is within order. I suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that he creates opportunities to raise the matter through the Order Paper—Question Time, early-day motions or even an Adjournment debate. He can then put the record straight as he thinks fit. He must use the Order Paper, and, as a long-standing Member of the House, he well knows how to use it to the best advantage.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In response to a question from the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) at last Wednesday's Question Time, the Prime Minister said that, within a few days, the Home Secretary would make an announcement about the Labour party's approach to fox hunting. We have now almost reached the end of the Session. It has been suggested that, as a fig leaf for the Prime Minister's embarrassment, the Home Secretary might answer a written question tomorrow. Have you, Madam Speaker, received a request from the Home Secretary to come to the House to make a proper statement on the subject?

Madam Speaker: No, I have had no request for any such statement.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether you have received a request from the Government for a Minister to make a statement to the House about the position in Chechnya, where hundreds of innocent civilians are being killed and wounded, refugees are being denied safe passage and it appears that we may well be on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe. Has any Foreign Office Minister requested an opportunity to make a statement on those matters?

Madam Speaker: I am very conscious of the serious situation in that part of the world. As yet, I have not received a request from any Minister to make a statement on the issue.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This weekend, the Prime Minister will attend the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government. Many of us are concerned about the outcome of those negotiations—and in particular whether the Prime Minister will raise the issue of the Commonwealth ban on beef. Given that we have the unhappy coincidence of Prorogation with that meeting, is there a mechanism whereby the Prime Minister can report back to the House on the outcome of the meeting, as he would do if we were sitting?

Madam Speaker: When the House is prorogued, the Prime Minister can make no report to the House.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In the light of your preparedness to listen to the point of order raised by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), may we therefore presume that points of order of that nature will be heard by the Chair?

Madam Speaker: No, the hon. Member cannot assume anything. I receive many requests for points of order that are in fact points of frustration or anything other than points of order. I believed, on hearing the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), that he was about to make a serious point of order that should concern me. It was for that reason, and that reason alone, that I felt he should be heard.

Orders of the Day

House of Lords Bill

Lords amendments considered.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 1, after clause 1, to insert the following new clause—*Exception from section 1*—

(".—(1) Section 1 shall not apply in relation to anyone excepted from it by or in accordance with Standing Orders of the House.

(2) At any one time 90 people shall be excepted from section 1; but anyone excepted as holder of the office of Earl Marshal, or as performing the office of Lord Great Chamberlain, shall not count towards that limit.

(3) Once excepted from section 1, a person shall continue to be so throughout his life (until an Act of Parliament provides to the contrary).

(4) Standing Orders shall make provision for filling vacancies among the people excepted from section 1; and in any case where—

(a) the vacancy arises on a death occurring after the end of the first Session of the next Parliament after that in which this Act is passed, and

(b) the deceased person was excepted in consequence of an election,

that provision shall require the holding of a by-election.

(5) A person may be excepted from section 1 by or in accordance with Standing Orders made in anticipation of the enactment or commencement of this section.

(6) Any question whether a person is excepted from section 1 shall be decided by the Clerk of the Parliaments, whose certificate shall be conclusive.")

3.35 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I beg to move amendment (f) to the Lords amendment, after 'time', insert 'no more than'.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendments (b), (c) and (e) to the Lords amendment and Lords amendments Nos. 3 and 5 to 12.

Mr. Mackinlay: I understand why the Government accepted the Weatherill proposals. Although I do not welcome them, I always recognise the need to seize political opportunities. That is precisely, and legitimately, what the Government have done in furtherance of our objective to abolish the hereditary peerage and establish a reformed upper House. However, there are some consequences of the Government accepting the Weatherill amendment which I do not accept. The devil is in the detail, as I shall draw to the House's attention. As a result, I tabled amendments (c) and (f) to the Lords amendment.

As the Bill stands, it provides for elected hereditary peers to be succeeded on death. The Weatherill compromise threw up, by election, some 90-odd hereditary peers. When we heard of the instigation of the so-called Weatherill compromise, many of us assumed that those who were elected would be the last of the large body of hereditary peers. However, in the detail—detail that was added in the final stages of proceedings on the Bill in the House of Lords, and therefore not part of the original so-called deal—there is provision for an elected hereditary peer to be succeeded by another when he is called to the great parliamentary Chamber on high. That is not satisfactory or in the spirit of what we were led to believe was the Weatherill compromise.

My amendments would ensure that those who have been elected would remain in the House of Lords for life, but, as a group, their membership of it would wither on the vine. Indeed, the consequence of striking out subsection (4) would be to create life peers of the elected hereditary peers. I remind my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that, in so doing, we would be fulfilling a manifesto commitment.

I, my right hon. Friend and our hon. Friends are the custodians of our election manifesto, which it is always helpful to have with one on these occasions. I hope that the House will permit me to refer to the explicit undertakings in our manifesto, which says:

"As an initial, self-contained reform, not dependent on further reform in the future, the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords will be ended by statute. This will be the first stage in a process of reform".

There is no ambiguity about that. We made a firm election commitment to abolish the hereditary peerage in this Parliament.

I have acknowledged the need to accept the so-called Weatherill compromise, but I believe that we can still do so and fulfil to the letter our manifesto commitment. I invite my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to break new ground and accept amendments (f) and (c). During the hocus-pocus and consternation relating to the Weatherill compromise, when the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords was sacked, it was never spelled out that we would allow hereditary peers to be succeeded. A very generous compromise has been reached, and I believe that we should say that we stand by our election manifesto in that regard.

I believe that I can call upon historic precedent in this matter.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I am puzzled by the extent of the hon. Gentleman's amendment. Is he excluding from it the Earl Marshal and the Lord Great Chamberlain? Does he consider that they should be able to hand their great offices down to their descendants?

Mr. Mackinlay: I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would not notice that, because even I am not always as candid as I should like. The Earl Marshals—I believe that there are about three office holders—will probably remain until whenever Parliament returns to the matter. I am a reasonable man, so I do not want to go to the wall on that narrow point. I am concerned about the great bulk—the great tranche—of 90 hereditary peers who are being given the right to sit in the House of Lords for the time being. I have reluctantly conceded that they should be given that right, but in my view there was never any suggestion that they should enjoy the opportunity to be succeeded by further peers.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: No, because I guess that the hon. Gentleman is likely to have an opportunity to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, and I should like to develop my argument on precedence.

As a consequence of the legislation, passed by Parliament, that created the Irish Free State in the early 1920s, elections were no longer held for the elected representative Irish peers. Those peers were allowed to wither on the vine. I believe that the last Irish peer to sit in Parliament was the grandfather of Richard Needham, who is known to us all. There were never any more elections. As a consequence of that Irish legislation, the elected peers became de facto life peers, and that is precisely what I am suggesting should happen in this case. It would be highly appropriate.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House intends that there should be a second stage of reform—I do not doubt her personal commitment to that. I note that my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary are nodding, but they might not be on the Front Bench for ever. There are also likely to be other compelling pressures on Government legislative time, which may, in all probability, kick the matter into touch. Indeed, that has been the history of House of Lords reform. There has never been a suitable time or date—there has never been an occasion when there could be concord across parties. Let us hope that we are wrong, but let us assume that this will be the last time that Parliament visits the issue for a little while.

If my colleagues say that I am being unfair or unrealistic—a charge which I do not accept—I suggest that they examine the Lords amendment. The provisions that we are discussing, which I wish to amend, underscore the fact that there will be some perpetuity in the idea of hereditaries continuing. As the provisions stand, for the next two years, if a vacancy occurs among the elected hereditaries, the agreed system is that he should be succeeded by the next person in ranking order in the recent election. However, after 2003 there is provision for by-elections. That takes us well into the next Parliament, and I have a feeling that things will be bedded down by then. There may not be the opportunities that exist now to achieve even limited agreement across parties.

The new Labour Government will be rapacious in their appetite for parliamentary time and the implementation of their social programme—I certainly hope so—and I foresee therefore that this matter will not be revisited. The Bill, as before us, buttresses my argument that provision is being made for hereditary peers to go on and on.

3.45 pm

Bearing in mind the historic precedent of the Irish peerage and the fact that there is agreement throughout the country that reform of the House of Lords must be completed in this Parliament, at least as an interim, I hope that we will not negate the manifesto commitment to do away with the hereditary peerage and that the House will find merit in my amendments, which will ensure that there are no hereditaries hereafter.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): In 52 days from now, we shall reach the end of the 20th century. Few of those who saw the start of this century, and certainly not those who founded the Labour party almost 100 years ago, would have found it credible that the crucial step that we propose to take today—a step that they advocated when our party was founded—would still be incomplete some 89 years after those in this House imagined that reform had begun. We have spent more years discussing Lords reform in this century than it has days left to run, yet the Conservative party is still calling for more time.

As we begin the discussions today, we take the next and arguably the most crucial step in the journey that began so long ago. During this century of breathtaking change, much has been done to change, modernise and improve our Parliament. All men and even all women have gained the right to vote—the right to have their say in how and by whom our country is governed—yet while not just a wind, but a hurricane of change has swept through our country and most of our institutions, in one corner of our legislature time has, in effect, stood still.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Not for a moment.

Some 750 of our fellow countrymen and, in a few cases, fellow countrywomen retain to this day the right to a place in the other House solely on the basis of their birth, not of their achievements or even of their capacity. Some of them have a record of achievement or service of which anyone would, rightly, be proud. Some of them are wise. That is beside the point, because they do not need to be so.

The acceptance of the amendment in the House of Lords was, in effect, an acceptance that the right to sit in our legislature can no longer be handed down as though it were a possession or a piece of property.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. She criticises the right of hereditary peers, which has been in existence for 600 years. The Prime Minister is using his patronage to create between two and four Labour life peers a week. How long is that likely to continue?

Mrs. Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman has been paying attention to the debates—I think that he is a new attender—he would know that the Government have made it plain that the most that we would seek in the House of Lords is parity with the Conservative party.

The hon. Gentleman refers to the number and speed of creations since the general election. I do not recall when he entered the House, but I am sure that he has been present from the 1980s. He knows that the former Tory Prime Ministers—both Lady Thatcher and the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—used their power of patronage to create twice as many Conservative peers as Labour peers, although the Conservative party already had—

Mr. Clifton-Brown *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Beckett: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head. The numbers are on the record, and the Conservative party already had a majority in the House of Lords. I repeat that the Government have said that we do not believe that any political party should have a majority

[Mrs. Beckett]

in the House of Lords, which the hon. Gentleman's party has been most reluctant to echo. We seek not a majority, but broad parity in the House of Lords.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): As regards the hereditaries, did not the recent incident in another place illustrate the argument? Someone was protesting because in future he would not be able to sit there. His father's title stems from a relationship between Charles II and Nell Gwynne more than 300 years ago. How can it possibly be justified that someone should sit in Parliament because of a relationship between a monarch and a lady that took place so long ago? That person performed a good service by showing how absurd it is for the hereditaries to continue.

Mrs. Beckett: I am usually most grateful for my hon. Friend's interventions, but I was trying to avoid introducing the Earl of Burford into the debate, although I agree that, from our point of view, he came straight from central casting as, indeed, did his argument. As my hon. Friend says, in this day and age it is absurd to find people who still argue that they should serve in our legislature on such a basis.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): The right hon. Lady sought to justify the huge number of life peers created by the Prime Minister by saying that Margaret Thatcher did something similar. As a matter of record, 175 peers have been created in the two and a half years since the election. That is almost as many as Margaret Thatcher managed in 11 years. Since the introduction of life peers in 1958, no Prime Minister has appointed more than 50 per cent. from his or her own party, except the current Prime Minister.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman made that point earlier in our debates. To do him justice, perhaps he did not entirely follow the point I was making. I was not talking about numbers. First, Lady Thatcher and the right hon. Member for Huntingdon appointed far more Conservative life peers than life peers of any other party. Indeed, until 1989 more than twice as many Conservative as Labour peers were created and almost twice as many were created up to 1996. Secondly, although numbers decrease in all parties over time through ill-health and death, Lady Thatcher in particular absolutely refused to create Labour life peers to make up the numbers, as previous Prime Ministers from any party had done. That is why the decline in the number of Labour life peers was so stark and why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been forced to make redress in the early days of this Parliament.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): To revert for a moment to discussing Lord Burford, can my right hon. Friend explain exactly why a new category of hereditary electors should have been created so that, when he succeeds to the dukedom of St. Albans, he will be allowed to vote for a Member of the new second Chamber? Indeed, he will be eligible to be elected, if his behaviour improves, and will be voted for only by other hereditary electors. What part is there for a modernising Government in creating a category of persons who can stand for election and vote only if they are hereditary? Is not my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) absolutely right?

Mrs. Beckett: The system to which my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) alluded—I shall return to his point in a moment—will come into being only if we are unable to achieve agreement on the way in which we should proceed to stage 2. If, as we all hope, the royal commission reports on time and there is broad acceptance of its proposals, it is more than likely that the mechanism to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) alludes will never have to be put in place.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is the right hon. Lady saying that in order to deal with the Government's failure to complete the reforms, she has to create two alternative mechanisms for bolstering the numbers in the Lords—a rotten democratic system that would be recognisable to the ancient voters of Old Sarum or patronage from the Prime Minister? Why on earth are numbers in the other place not allowed to dwindle while the reforms go on, thereby accelerating the move towards total reform?

Mrs. Beckett: I am not saying either of those things. As the hon. Gentleman may have noticed, the proposals that I am describing do not come from the Government. The issue before us is whether the Government, as a means of achieving our principal end, are prepared to accept the amendment. I shall come back to that in a moment.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): The right hon. Lady said earlier that a great deal of time had been spent on discussion of reform of the House of Lords. She will recall that that time was spent on discussing what should replace it. I have not played a large part in the argument, because it strikes me as being largely esoteric, given what the Government have decided to do. My problem is that I have never encountered another circumstance in which those in charge have decided to get rid of what is there before deciding what to put in its place.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), with whom I never agree except in a religious context, is in a difficult position, because he has identified the Government's own problem. If the Government had proposed to the House an alternative, we could have voted positively. The Government, however, are suggesting that we get rid of what we have, and have not a hope in hell of deciding what we are to put in its place. Would not the right hon. Lady be happier if she could propose something positive, rather than being in such a difficult position with her own side?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman is kind to be concerned, but I assure him that I feel no difficulty whatever. Indeed, I am grateful for his intervention, which brings me to the point that I was about to make.

The Government have a simple and straightforward reason for proceeding in this way, which we have made crystal clear from the beginning. Debate on the issue has always been hamstrung, and proposals to change the principle of membership of our legislature on the ground of heredity has always been defeated, because those who

fought all change have been joined in their resistance by those who disliked one or all of the proposed alternatives. That is precisely why the Government chose to separate the removal of the hereditary peers from proposals for their future. Given that that is what has prolonged this debate for 89 years, it is, I suspect, very meaningful that the Conservative party is trying, unsuccessfully, to continue the same tactic.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, but then I really must get on.

Mr. Gill: Will the right hon. Lady explain what is the democratic legitimacy of life peers?

Mrs. Beckett: The legitimacy of life peers is exactly the same as it has been since their establishment by, I think, a Conservative Government in 1958. They are appointed, or given their position, by the Queen, on the suggestion of the Prime Minister of the day.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): That is not very democratic.

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman says, sotto voce—well, not very sotto voce, anyway—that that is not very democratic. The procedure was established by a Conservative Government in order, I believe, to make the House of Lords more acceptable than it would otherwise have been without any element of life peerage. The issue will, however, be brought into context when we discuss stage 2 of reform. The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) will appreciate that we are not discussing that today. I simply remind him that, when the hereditary peers are removed, a substantial number of life peers will remain on the basis of their achievement, along with some hereditaries chosen by their peers, also on the basis of achievement.

Mr. Tony Benn: Will the right hon. Lady give way on that specific point?

Mrs. Beckett: I will, but I will not give way again until I have made much more progress, and, hopefully, finished what was intended to be a very short speech.

4 pm

Mr. Benn: May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to two points? First, hereditary peers who are elected will be able to claim a certain electoral legitimacy, while life peers will not. An hereditary peer who is elected will say to a life peer, "You were appointed, but I was elected."

Secondly, is my right hon. Friend aware that there is another way of appointing peers? I refer to their appointment by the House of Commons itself. On retirement, every Speaker is made a peer, not by the Prime Minister but through a humble address praying that a signal mark of royal favour may be conferred on the right hon. Jack Weatherill, or whoever it happens to be. The House makes peers in respect of its own Speakers. Were the present Speaker—whose retirement I hope does not occur in my lifetime—to come to the end of her term, I have no doubt that the House would ask the Crown to act. It is entirely untrue to say that there is any democratic legitimacy in a leader of either party putting people into Parliament and allowing them to vote on the laws that we are all expected to obey. That is the problem that the Government simply have not addressed from the beginning.

Mrs. Beckett: My right hon. Friend believes that hereditary peers—presumably, those who remain—will have a greater legitimacy because they are elected by others of their fellows. It gives them a reason for being there. It is a mechanism for deciding those who will remain—I hope for a fairly short period—but whether it gives them democratic legitimacy is another point. It is not a point that I would make. If he wishes to make it, it is a matter for him.

My right hon. Friend separately pursues the issue of what he believes the Government should do instead. Again, it is open to him to do that, as it is to Opposition Members. I remind him simply that it is through doing that that Opposition Members have managed to keep the discussion going for 89 years. He should not fall into the trap that they clearly still seek to set, of so prolonging an interesting discussion about the best way to have legitimacy in what succeeds the present House that we keep it in its present form.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I did say that I would not give way.

I remind both my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield and Opposition Members that our Prime Minister is the first ever to volunteer to give up some of the power of patronage that he enjoys and that he has already done so by passing—

Mr. Forth: Pull the other one.

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry to say it, but the right hon. Gentleman is insulting when he says, "Pull the other one." He should consult the Leader of the Opposition. If he does, he will learn that the Prime Minister forwarded to the relevant authorities the names—unchanged and unchallenged—of those nominated by the Leader of the Opposition. He had every right to change and to challenge them. He has not done so; he has forgone that right. That makes him the first Prime Minister in history both to offer and actually to carry out his offer to reduce his patronage.

Mr. Bercow: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: It really will be the last time.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, whose better nature is always on display in the House.

Does the right hon. Lady's unwillingness to state what the democratic legitimacy of appointed peers is result from the fact that, in 1958, if memory serves me correctly, Labour Members did not support the Life Peerages Bill

[Mr. Bercow]

and, in that respect, if not in any other, they formed an alliance with Enoch Powell, the former right hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West?

Mrs. Beckett: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman: as someone was speaking to me, I did not follow all the point that he made. He is right that there have been all manner of unholy alliances across the Chamber, which have, between them, managed to scupper all previous attempts to reform the House of Lords with the removal of the hereditary element. Certainly there were those who, no doubt because they wished to see that reform, had reservations about the introduction of life peerages. Therefore, he is right that it has been a checkered process. That is all the more reason to begin to draw it to a close. It is kind of him to suggest that my better nature is always on display here. It shows that he has not been in the House for longer than the current Parliament, although I was a little hurt to see Madam Speaker shaking her head, but I move on.

Madam Speaker: It was the flattery and audacity of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that made me do so.

Mrs. Beckett: Ah! I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for clarifying that point.

It has long been accepted that, among the ranks of hereditary peers, some played a larger or more significant role than others. It has also long been accepted that, although a continued right to inherit a seat in the Lords could not be sustained, a continued presence for some of those whose past membership was by inheritance was not, of itself, inconsistent with a transitional House. Those who attended our earlier proceedings will recall that there was some fairly lengthy debate on such a principle, instigated by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing).

During that debate, I made it clear that our manifesto commitment—as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock correctly identified—was to propose to remove the right to sit and to vote in our legislature on the basis of heredity as an initial self-contained reform, not dependent on further reform in the future, so the Government's underlying preference was for the Bill as drafted in all its elegant simplicity.

I also made it clear, however, that should such a scheme be worked out, and should it command support in the other places—which is by no means a foregone conclusion—the Government would be prepared to consider whether it might, after all, lead to a broader consensus and broader acceptance of the Bill itself. It was also made quite explicit that, should the Opposition use their huge built-in majority among hereditary peers to disrupt the Government's programme, in defiance of legislative conventions, that would be seen as destroying any such consensus. On that basis—the acceptance of progress on Lords reform, without the initially threatened total disruption of Government business—we were able to make progress on the Food Standards Bill, and even on the Railways Bill, in addition to the programme originally announced in the Queen's Speech.

We are not, of course, quite at the end of the Session, and one should never presume the consent of Parliament—I never do—but, on the basis of what now seems to be the position, I am prepared to recommend to the House that we accept this group of Lords amendments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock has spoken to his amendments, expressing his reservations—which I suspect are shared by other hon. Members—about the Lords amendment. He drew attention to the fact that the final text of the Lords amendment allows for hereditary peers to be succeeded and for a mechanism to replace any of those who might die. He also expressed his belief that the hereditary peers who might remain because of what has come to be known as the Weatherill compromise would be the last to serve in the other place.

My hon. Friend said, quite correctly, that the proposal in Lords amendment No. 1 was not part of our original manifesto; as I said, we made that clear both on Second Reading and in Committee. He also said that the succession—or by-election—mechanism was not part of the original deal. He was right about that, too. The proposals were accepted by the Government for the precise reasons expressed by my hon. Friend. I was sorry to hear him say—although I understand his reasons for doing so—that he doubts the speed with which we might proceed to stage 2. He will know that those doubts were shared in spades by those who discussed the issue in the other place and by hon. Members in this place—some of whom will undoubtedly make the same point later in the debate, should they catch the eye of the Chair. I do not share those doubts, and do not believe that stage 2 is receding into the far distance.

Undoubtedly, genuine concerns were expressed in the House of Lords that, should the introduction of stage 2 be unduly prolonged—for more than a couple of years—it would seem increasingly wrong for those who have been allowed to remain in the transitional House to be replaced by earlier runners-up. The Government agreed to accept those proposals to reassure all concerned of our good will and good intentions on the matter.

As I said, those proposals—like the Weatherill proposals themselves—were not made by the Government or a part of our original intentions. Nevertheless, although they did not form part of our original intentions, we take the view that they will allow us to pursue a prudent and sensible route towards early removal of all hereditary peers, which is the Bill's underlying purpose.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I said that I would not give way again, but shall do so briefly to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Howarth: I shall not seek to emulate my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) in the flattery stakes, because I am not as good at it as he is. Will the Leader of the House reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who said that the Government have nothing with which to replace the current Upper House? Why is she so confident that a consensus may be found—not only in this place,

but among the public—on a new formulation for the Upper House, when such a solution has eluded us for the past 89 years?

Mrs. Beckett: For one thing, the Government have made real progress by breaking the link between stages 1 and 2. I also believe—the hon. Gentleman has attended our debates and may have heard me say this before—that the maintenance of that link has prevented any sensible and constructive debate about what stage 2 ought to be and what the nature, role and, indeed, the position of a second Chamber should be. All our previous discussions of the matter have been bedevilled by anxieties and deals, of the sort to which my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock referred, relating to the position of hereditary peers in a future second Chamber. In many ways, those discussions have had the sword of Damocles hanging over them because the substantial number of hereditary peers entitled to sit in the existing second Chamber has meant that they have had the whip hand over what should succeed them.

Only when we have completed stage 1 can we properly discuss stage 2. The hon. Gentleman may be right: it may not be possible to reach absolute consensus. However, I suspect that we will get further forward and have more chance of achieving a sensible outcome to stage 2 than we would ever have done in previous discussions.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who has been patient with interventions. On how the procedures have emerged during the legislative stage in the House of Lords, does she share my irritation and think it an irony that when the Bill was presented to this House it was described as tightly drawn? On Second Reading and in Committee, the Clerk told us that there was little scope for tabling amendments. It was a challenge for us to table an amendment—I succeeded, but it was extraordinarily difficult. In the House of Lords, the peers have been able to open up the Bill and add all these amendments without there being any reciprocity for the elected House to shape and mould the legislation. Hurt is put on hurt. It is repugnant that those in another place can have all their say and that we, who have a mandate, cannot.

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot follow my hon. Friend down that path. For one thing, it is for the Chair to decide what is not in order. He is right to say that the Bill is simple and well drawn from that point of view and that it was not possible for Members to raise many of the issues that they wished through tabling amendments. However, if my memory serves me right, we managed in one way or another to deal with most of them in the debate. Equally, it is wrong to suggest that in some way different rules apply in the House of Lords. The simple answer is that the Lords found a way to put the matter in order.

As for whether one should feel great resentment and whether reciprocity should apply in this House, first, as Leader of the House of Commons—I have always said in this context that I am a House of Commons woman—I am resolute in my defence of the supremacy of this House. I hope that any proposals would never threaten that supremacy. On my hon. Friend's anxiety that hereditary peers had a greater opportunity to discuss or change the Bill in the House of Lords than we had, he should console himself with the thought that, for most of them, it was for the last time.

Mr. Gill: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry, but I have given way to the hon. Gentleman before and I must finish.

I must place on record the fact that the Government are well aware that, apart from the specific issues of replacement and potential by-elections that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock raised, there are other matters about which hon. Members on both sides of the House are unhappy. The first concerns some of the detail of Lords amendment No. 1—the Weatherill amendment. Some hon. Members also object to the principle of the proposals. I accept that those are valid and legitimate concerns, but the Government believe that the House can live with and accept what are transitional proposals for a transitional House.

Everyone has gained something from the understanding that we have reached. The Government have not only gained but added to their legislative programme, with measures—in particular on food safety—that are of much worth and importance to the British people.

The House of Lords has gained a broadly—although not universally—supported mechanism that allows the continued participation, albeit on a different basis, of some of its most active and experienced hereditary Members. The country will gain if, as a result of the passage of the Bill, we begin for the first time in our long and varied history to have a mature and considered debate about what a second legislative Chamber ought to be and do without that debate being driven almost exclusively by the interests of hereditary peers and how those interests should be accommodated in a new House.

4.15 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I am awfully sorry; I would have given way to the hon. Lady earlier, but I have almost finished.

If we accept the amendment and put the Bill on to the statute book tonight, we can honestly say that Britain will have taken a massive step forward that is at least a century overdue and has been resisted by the forces of conservatism, with and without a capital C, to this day. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am pleased to hear that reaction from the Conservatives, because it places their opposition to the change firmly on the record.

We believe that putting the Bill on to the statute book will be an achievement of which we can be justly proud. That achievement will resonate not just down the years, but down the centuries. I commend it to the House.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): If one wanted an epitaph to the Government's management of the legislative programme and their record on constitutional reform, one could do no better than look at the amendments before the House this afternoon, hours before the Government plan to prorogue. Some badly managed business over the past few days concludes with this half-completed business on the Lords today.

[Sir George Young]

The Third Reading of the Bill, as amended in another place, was on the Thursday before last—nearly a fortnight ago. We could have dealt with the amendments on Monday and Tuesday of last week. The House finished its business early on those days after an interesting but perhaps less challenging debate on whether Acts of Parliament should be printed on vellum or on paper. That would have given more time for the other Bills that we have been dealing with in the past week.

Instead, after those two quiet days we have had guillotines or announcements about them almost every day and an unseemly rush to complete the Government's business, which has at times degenerated into farce. We should be grateful that the Bill was not drafted by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which tabled 800 Government amendments to the Greater London Authority Bill in another place.

The Government have held back consideration of this important amendment until the end of the Session as part of some crude pressure on the second Chamber. They invite us to deal with it now, as the lights dim before Prorogation. It was only thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) that we were able to debate the issue the first time round.

It is possible, as the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has said, that the second Chamber, whose powers and composition are affected by all the amendments, may last for some time, yet we discuss it in this unsatisfactory way. With the hasty consideration of all the other Bills over the past few days, I have to say that this is no way to manage the legislative programme.

This is a Bill without vision or purpose, without principle or strategy. It is an attack not so much on privilege, but on wisdom, independence, duty and public service. The Bill makes way not for something that is better and permanent, but for something that is inferior and temporary. The Government have embarked on a constitutional journey without a compass. When they were getting lost, they decided to throw overboard many of the more experienced sailors. They then had second thoughts and despatched a lifeboat, manned by Captain Weatherill, to rescue some of them. Then they rang down for Admiral Wakeham to see if he could tell them where to go. That is no way to reform the British constitution.

Mr. Gummer: Does it strike my right hon. Friend as curious that all previous Governments bent on reforming the House of Lords, led by experienced politicians, have recognised that it was their constitutional duty to propose to the House of Commons an alternative? This is the first Government to produce a reform Bill that proposes no alternative. Is it just possible that all the others were right in their judgment of constitutional propriety and that this Government are wholly wrong?

Sir George Young: I agree with my right hon. Friend. He makes an interesting point, which sits neatly against that made by the Leader of the House. She asserted that breaking the process into two made it more likely that stage 2 would be reached. One could equally forcefully put precisely the opposite proposition—that after completing stage 1 and disposing of the hereditary peers, stage 2 becomes less likely.

The amendment deals with the so-called Weatherill peers. The hereditary peers, who we are told are an offence to the democratic process, conducted their elections during the past few weeks with a dignity and decorum that has so far been absent from the process of choosing a Labour candidate for the mayor of London; a process allegedly conducted by those more familiar with the democratic process.

The electoral college in the amendment is all the hereditary peers, and most will not be in the transitional House. Frankly, they deserve better than the charmless "thank you and goodbye" from those on the Government Benches in the other place, with the emphasis, as it was, on the goodbye rather than the thank you. I read in *The Sunday Times* on 7 November that a spokesman for Baroness Jay said:

"They'll be getting a glass of champagne when the House prorogues. What more do they want after 800 years?"

On behalf of the Opposition, I want to place on the record our deep appreciation of the work of those hereditary peers who are not covered by the amendment. They and their predecessors have a record of public service to Britain of which they should be proud and for which we should be grateful. We are sad to see so many distinguished parliamentarians leaving the upper House, including scores of people who have given dedicated voluntary services over many years. Time and again, they have stood up for common sense and the rights of the weak against powerful Governments of all colours, and we saw them do that again last Monday.

History will judge those peers better than fashion now does. Parliament will be the lesser for their going. They deserve better than the graceless and charmless farewell from the Leader of the upper House. If the new House has a shred of the decency, courtesy, independence and open-mindedness of the old, it will be the better for it.

Angela Smith (Basildon): The hon. Gentleman's comments go to the heart of the Opposition's misunderstanding of the matter. Labour Members have never criticised those active individual peers who have given a great deal of service; it is because they have no legitimacy that we have criticised them.

Sir George Young: An elementary matter of courtesy should be discharged by those in the other place. That was omitted and I was happy to put that fact on the record on behalf of the Opposition.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: I should like to make some progress.

I doubt that the Leader of the House enjoyed delivering the speech that she just made, inviting, as she did, her right hon. and hon. Friends to vote down a clear manifesto commitment. Last week, I heard hon. Members ask where the manifesto commitment for the reductions in benefits for the disabled was. They were referred to some rather general commitments to reform the welfare state, which persuaded enough of them to support the Government.

Today, however, Labour Members must have listened to the President of the Council—a title that has survived modernisation—with some incredulity. The manifesto commitment could not have been clearer:

"As an initial, self-contained reform, not dependent on further reform in the future, the rights of the hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords will be ended by statute."

Now they will not. Hereditary peers will be sitting and voting in the other place in the next Parliament despite the efforts of the people's party, and that Parliament will be the better served by their presence. Unlike life peers, they will owe nothing to the patronage of anyone living for their place there. Labour Members want to replace time-honoured privilege with modern patronage. They are a party which hates the past, but which is afraid to shape the future.

Many of my hon. Friends will have seen *The Sunday Times* last Sunday, which stated:

"Blair wants the Committee on Lords reform to stop discussing policy. He wants it to start discussing tactics. Denis Carter lost his temper. 'Tactics! Tactics! All he thinks about are tactics! He's got no policy at all!'"

Policy he may not have; patronage he has. The Prime Minister has created 171 peers in less than two and a half years—more, as we have heard, than my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) managed in seven years. One third of all life peers have been appointed by the Prime Minister. One quarter of the new House will owe its presence there to the Prime Minister. Is that the sort of second Chamber that we want?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman will recognise that despite what he and his colleagues suggest is the unreasonable exercise of patronage, there are still more Conservative life peers than Labour life peers. This reflects the point that I made to him earlier.

Sir George Young: I hope that the Leader of the House is not concluding that we want a house of patronage, which would be deeply damaging to Parliament.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) has said, we should not be dealing with this amendment at all. If the Government wanted to reform the second Chamber, they should have done so rationally and thoroughly. If they had made faster progress—as we urged them to—we would have the report of the royal commission before us, and we could have dealt with the whole matter sensibly and coherently. We could have dealt with stage 1 and stage 2 together—demolition and reconstruction. We could then have judged whether what the Government proposed was better or worse than what we have at the moment.

The Times put it very well in a leader on 15 May, which said:

"We see no sufficient justification for a measure which merely abolishes the participation of the hereditary peers before the composition of the new second Chamber has been determined."

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In years to come, when the hereditary peers have had time to reflect on why, in the early 1990s, the Labour party suddenly took a greater interest in the question of reform, they would do well to reflect on a few votes in the House of Lords in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as on the community charge or poll tax. Labour activists were incensed that these people came to London uniquely to vote in favour of their own self-interest. When they reflect on these matters, they might then consider why this has happened.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman asks an interesting question—should a revised second Chamber have the right to overthrow a manifesto commitment of the elected Chamber? That is the implication of what he has said. Even if one concedes his argument, it does not deal with my point. We should have reconstruction at the same time as demolition. The Government's failure to approach this task in a logical and considered way is typical of their approach to the constitution, which they treat with cavalier disregard.

Mr. Mackinlay: It will not have escaped the notice of the House that the Conservatives never proposed reform of the upper House—at least not on the scale that we are talking about now. The right hon. Gentleman said that we should wait for the royal commission. Will he give an undertaking, on behalf of the Opposition, that they will support the recommendations of the royal commission, and will be prepared to do so in the Lobby? If not, it will underline the point that there is not much prospect of getting consensus and legislation for the next stage.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman asks me to give a commitment which I very much doubt his right hon. Friend the Leader of the House would have given had he asked her. We are delighted that the royal commission has been appointed, and we await its deliberations with interest. However, it is not right to say that we have not reformed the House of Lords—we introduced life peerages in the 1950s.

Mr. Bercow: It seems as if the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) misrepresents the thinking of Conservative Members of Parliament. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most distinguished Conservative philosopher of all time, Edmund Burke, was right to say that the state which lacks the means of change lacks the means of its conservation, but that the criterion according to which we should judge the desirability of change is whether it is practically effective, and not on the basis of some abstract theory?

Sir George Young: I agree entirely.

In the amendment, we see the 92 Weatherill peers as the hereditary grit in the constitutional oyster, provoking the Government to produce a pearl of constitutional reform. Indeed, we need to press the Government to move to stage 2—proper, genuine reform. We may then have not a house of patronage, but something better than what we have lost. The amendment keeps in public service a number of people who would otherwise have been lost, bringing with them continuity, experience and judgment.

4.30 pm

I disagree with what the hon. Member for Thurrock said about the by-election arrangements. I welcome the proposals on the replacement of Weatherill peers who die. That will happen from the end of the first Session of the next Parliament if stage 2 has not been enacted by then. Until then, places will be filled by the nearest losers in last week's ballot. The ballot for the 15 Deputy Speakers

[Sir George Young]

disproved the assertion that the House is run by Conservatives for Conservatives. The top two were a Cross Bencher and a Labour peer.

Originally, the Government said that by-elections should be left to Standing Orders. That would have meant that the remaining hereditary peers could have been allowed to wither on the vine and we could then have seen a quango House created by stealth. If the transitional Chamber lasts and is not to be wholly appointed, we need some means of replacing the elected peers. The amendment means that if the Government subsequently want to knock out peers who are elected, they will have to do so by primary legislation in the full glare of public debate.

In the meantime, the Bill has been a distraction for the second Chamber, whose main task has been to hold this Government to account and scrutinise this Session's massive legislative programme. Worse, the Government have sought to set House of Commons against House of Lords when the real battle today is between Parliament and the Executive. The two Chambers are allies in that battle, not enemies.

This is all being done in the name of democracy and modernising Parliament. However, the Government are not modernising Parliament but marginalising it. Parliament needs not modernisation but strengthening. As this Session draws to a close, we see a Government losing control of their legislative programme. We see a Government who never had control of the constitutional programme. They are in disarray as they choose a candidate for mayor and ignore the English dimension of devolution. They are in disarray on the second Chamber and proportional representation, on which they are walking away from their manifesto commitment to hold a referendum—all this from a party that has the nerve to lecture the country about joined-up government.

Tonight, we should say goodbye not to the hereditary peers but to this Government's irresponsible approach to the British constitution.

Mr. Benn: This is the second time the Weatherill amendment has been before the House. The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) moved it earlier in the Session and I received a three-line Whip to vote against it. Today, I have a three-line Whip to vote in favour of it. That puts loyal party members in some difficulty, although I think that André Maurois, in his famous book "Ariel"—about his time as a French liaison officer with the British Army in the first world war—said that orders contrary in sense from officers equal in rank cancel themselves out.

The amendment is a total breach of the manifesto on which we were elected. I have to say that, because there was no provision whatever not only to allow hereditary peers to remain but to let them elect each other in perpetuity. I think that parties should take their manifestos seriously, particularly as we had an overwhelming majority. By now, we could have had what I would like to have seen: a wholly elected second Chamber.

I agree with what was said by Opposition Members about personal abuse. I see no reason to abuse any person who has inherited a peerage. It would be difficult for me to take a contrary view. Indeed, I accept that many of the people who are hereditary peers have worked long and hard in the second Chamber. My objection to them is not their inheritance but their power. That is the question to which the Labour party has often given its attention.

As a matter of fact, I could justify my view on the ground of revenge, because on 18 February 1955, I was sitting in the Moses Room when five peers forced me out of the House of Commons, to which I had been elected, on the ground that I had a duty to go to a Chamber to which I had not been elected. However, I put that all aside.

The objectionable thing about hereditary and life peers is that neither have been elected. That is the problem: not how they get there. The national lottery could produce a second Chamber with the same difficulties. It is amazing that a House whose entire authority rests upon election—none of us is here by any reason other than the fact that people put us here—should be unable to manage to advance a credible argument for the election of the other Chamber. What makes this place different—and here I should like to argue the democratic case if it is not too controversial, although I sometimes think that it is—is that we are elected and removed by the people we represent. Because of that, we have to listen to them. I spoke about that during the Adjournment debate on this subject in the small hours of this morning. Our relationship with the electorate is the most important relationship of all. People seek out their representative; they say to me, "I have written to you, Mr. Benn, because you are my MP." There is none of that in the House of Lords, whether we are talking about life or hereditary peers. Not having to listen to people means that they can do what they like.

The prejudices of hereditary or life peers may be good or bad, but they are prejudices, and have no legitimacy or accountability. It is an insult that that should be put forward in a democratic society, even as part of a secret deal. I do not know when the negotiations with Lord Cranborne began. I read somewhere that it was before the election. Whether that is true—whether the Labour party was telling the public that it was going to get rid of the hereditary peers while Lord Cranborne was having private discussions with the then Leader of the Opposition—I do not know. Anyway, Lord Cranborne has been rewarded with a life peerage—the Cecils always end up on top.

The reality is that we were deliberately bypassed and, without being offensive—because it is not my purpose to argue in that way—I have to say that patronage is corrupting. I am not saying that corrupt deals take place, but to have the power of patronage corrupts the giver and to receive patronage corrupts the person who receives it. Surely a democratic Chamber should be able to argue that case without embarrassment, even in the presence of distinguished people who may be observing us from afar.

It took 700 years to make the House of Commons democratic. I have in previous debates cited some of the arguments that were used against extending the vote. When, before the first world war, suffragettes demanded that women should have the vote, Mr. Asquith, the great Liberal leader, said that if women got the vote it would destroy parliamentary democracy. I have looked it up in *Hansard*. When the Great Reform Bill went through, the Duke of Wellington argued that extending the franchise would destroy parliamentary democracy. These phrases have been used in every period of parliamentary history.

When, in 1972, I proposed having a referendum on the European question, Jeremy Thorpe said that it would destroy parliamentary democracy. We, who rightly acquire and lose our power and authority because we are elected, should be in no doubt about the basis of parliamentary election.

I shall vote against the amendment. When the Epping amendment was moved earlier, I told the House that I would vote against it then and I shall vote against it now. I know that it will not have any impact on the outcome. However, I do not believe that there will be a second stage in my lifetime, although I aim to live to 100. Why should a new House of Lords, recipient of a fresh statute, get rid of itself to please Lord Wakeham, the Prime Minister or anybody else? The House of Lords will not do that.

I have seen Lord Wakeham's proposals, which were leaked to *The Daily Telegraph*. He thinks that some of the Lords should be elected. I was staggered at his radicalism and boldness. There is no desire in the British establishment for an elected second Chamber. The British establishment has never liked democracy in this House, and it has no intention of seeing the virus spread to a second House. Until we make that clear, we shall be muddling along with small compromises that contribute nothing to the advancement of the people's right to determine how they are governed.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): In her opening remarks, the Leader of the House referred to a long journey, beginning at the start of the century. I suggest that the journey began much longer ago. One of the clichéd adjectives applied to the Bill as we reach its final stages in this debate is "historic". I should like to take up a little portion of time in the debate, as the substance of the hereditary legislative rights of the peerage passes into history, to say a few words about that history and its significance, as I see it, for this House, today and in the future.

It is a pity that much of the debate, especially speeches by Labour Members, has failed to recognise that we are touching on a fundamental matter. In his book "Germania", Tacitus describes the political institutions of our Teutonic ancestors as they were in his time, 1,900 years ago; they were already old then. He wrote:

"They choose their kings on account of their nobility, their leaders on account of their valour. On smaller matters,the chiefs debate, on greater matters all men, but so that those things whose final decision rests with the whole people are first handled by the chiefs".

In that account, we see the germ of the British constitution as it has survived to this day. There is a monarchy, essentially a sacred institution associated with the bloodline of a single family; thus the Queen can trace her ancestry back to Cerdic and the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in England. There is a popular assembly, no doubt informally representative even in its earliest form as described by Tacitus; that is the germ of the House of Commons. Finally, there are the chiefs: the great men, leaders in war and counsellors in peace, whose shades we disturb today as we debate this measure of House of Lords reform.

To see this set out in pristine clarity, we can do no worse than to turn to the formula that prefaces the Bill, as it does all other Acts. It clearly states the constitutional basis on which we make law and sets out the historic balance between the different elements in the process of lawmaking. It stands at the beginning of every one of our laws, which might explain why it is so little noticed. I shall read it out, so that the House can note the order and proportion of the words:

"Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons"—

a bit of an afterthought, reflecting the late place of this House in our national history—

"in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows".

It is interesting to consider how and when the composition of the councils of the chiefs became hereditary. There must have been an hereditary element, even in the earliest German assemblies: the principle of sacred blood rights did not attach only to the kingship. The reception of Christianity in the sixth century brought into the king's council the presence of bishops and abbots, who were not there by hereditary right. Nevertheless, when the representatives of the commons, the burgesses and the knights of the shire, came along in the 13th century—quite late in the day—the lay element of the king's great council had long enjoyed the right of hereditary succession. As the concept of the royal council faded into that of Parliament, that became one of the principal points of difference between what became known in the 16th century as the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

So far, my account may have struck some hon. Members as being of merely antiquarian interest, but if those now frowning bear with me, I shall attempt to demonstrate its relevance to our current position, because it relates to the discussion about legitimacy which marked the speech by the Leader of the House. The reason why—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Almost everyone has to lead into an argument, but the hon. Gentleman must lead into the amendment being debated, or I shall have to stop him. He should start talking about the amendment.

Mr. Jackson: That is precisely what I want to do, because this is the first opportunity we have had to discuss the issue.

The reason for the presence of the leading men in the royal councils was that property is power: even when the feudal monarchy was at its most powerful, property held from the Crown tended to be hereditary. That association between property and power draws our attention to the fundamental principle that underlay the historic House of Lords: that it is to the advantage of the realm that the most powerful men of the possessing classes should be involved in government and its responsibilities.

Throughout English history, there have been episodes of aristocratic anarchy. There was factionalism among the great men—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am reluctant to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but he must speak to the

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

amendment. The history of these matters is extremely interesting, but it is best reserved for another debate, not this one.

Mr. Jackson: I am pursuing the subject of our debate. Legitimacy is relevant to the hereditary principle; it is at the heart of the issues that underlie the amendment. I want to continue to present my argument.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I tell the hon. Gentleman that we cannot go into the issues that underlie the amendment; we must discuss the amendment. If the hon. Gentleman cannot do that, I am sorry to tell him that he will have to resume his seat.

4.45 pm

Mr. Jackson: I am considering the hereditary principle, which is the subject of the amendment.

Angela Smith: I share the confusion in the House about the hon. Gentleman's comments. Is he defending the hereditary principle and claiming that it should persist today and save the House of Lords?

Mr. Jackson: I want to persist in my speech so that I can answer that question.

We have had a system that served the country well for a long time. One of the reasons for the contrast between English and continental history is that our solution to the problem of accommodating social and economic power with political power has been more successful than that in our neighbouring countries. Today, we are putting aside the remains of that great system. The amendment would preserve little more than a relic of it.

It is interesting to consider when our historic solution began to fall apart. Its failure is recent. Even today, if we were to examine the list of the 500 largest property owners in Britain, we would find that it included a striking number of peers, most of them descended from families that have held a similar position for more than a century. Until the 1960s at least, conscious efforts were made to introduce to the peerage most of the significant new power holders in business and industry.

As we approach 2000, however, we must acknowledge that we are in a different world. Our world today is not different in the way that most Labour Members and some on the Opposition Benches consider it different. The difference is not that democracy and the elective principle have triumphed, but that the rise of an industrial economy and the relative decline of agriculture, and the growing separation of control from ownership in business, have meant that property ownership has become increasingly anonymous and, at the same time, more international. The hereditary House of Lords is fading because national coherence, the national public realm and national capital are also fading.

During the debates on the Bill in this House, hon. Members have tended to condescend to the poor old hereditaries. We feel secure and justified because we have been elected. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made it clear that that was the basis of his argument. However, we make a grave mistake if we conclude that we can dismiss the principle on which the historic House of Lords was based. That principle is infinitely older than that of one man, one vote—as I have tried, perhaps in vain, to demonstrate. OMOV, as the Labour party calls it, is a 20th century phenomenon. It is associated as much with the tragedies of 20th century totalitarianism as with the triumphs of 20th century democracies. One of the enduring facts of life will continue to be that property is power. The difference today is that, as we move into the 21st century, Britain will no longer have a constitutional mechanism for binding the ownership of property to the exercise of public responsibility.

Angela Smith: We should accept that the proposals in the Weatherill amendment are transitional. I do not accept that we have reached the end of the argument. We are at stage 1 and we shall move on to stage 2. I was grateful for the assurances of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that we shall move to stage 2 as quickly as possible. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who is my neighbour, said that he was cautious about the amendment. However, it is up to hon. Members to ensure that the Leader of the House keeps her promise—I have no doubt that she will do so.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Will the hon. Lady hazard a guess as to when she thinks that we will reach stage 2?

Angela Smith: I do not presume to be able to answer that question; it is a matter for the Leader of the House. However, if delay is unacceptable, I am sure that hon. Members will communicate that fact to my right hon. Friend. The Liberal Democrats are ill equipped to comment about that issue as they gave us the current configuration of the House of Lords in 1911 and have not done anything further since then. I have more faith in my Government than in the Liberal Democrats.

Why should we accept the Weatherill amendment and allow peers to remain in the transitional House? Unlike the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), many of my hon. Friends and I stand by the principle that there should be no hereditary peers in the second Chamber. The arguments have been well rehearsed here and in another place. The issues were debated with more decorum here than in the other place, so I was surprised to hear the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) say that debates in the House of Lords were conducted with great decorum.

Fortunately, hon. Members' children have been far better behaved than the offspring of one of their lordships who, to the amazement of many, jumped up and down on the Woolsack. While claiming to defend tradition, he clearly showed no respect for it; while decrying the will of the elected House to be "treason", he showed no respect for democracy. In any other walk of life, such bizarre behaviour would disqualify a person from involvement in a given activity. Yet the Earl of Burford behaved in that manner in an attempt to defend his right to legislate on the basis of his birthright. It was a bit like the tantrum of a naughty child—and we all know that naughty children who throw tantrums do not get what they want. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members groan; I hope that they are not defending the Earl of Burford's actions.

The Conservative party's 1997 campaign guide was extremely illuminating on this point. I wonder whether the Conservatives were thinking of the Earl of Burford when they wrote:

"An asset to democracy, hereditary peers bring colour, tradition, youth and a wealth of experience to Parliament. They are linked to the customs and traditions that formed and shaped this country".

We could do without customs and colour such as that.

The amendment is an interesting distraction, but let us consider the legitimacy of the second Chamber as a transitional House rather than the antics of one rather bizarre peer.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I agree with the hon. Lady that this amendment is about colour and tradition rather than who holds the power. Does she share my concerns that, in the foreseeable future, people will continue to serve in the upper House who have never faced an election and who cannot be removed by the great British public? That is the key difference between the two Chambers.

Angela Smith: I shall come to that point in a moment.

Given the comments of Opposition Members, I do not think that today's debate is about the quality of hereditary peers. I have not heard any criticism from Labour Members of those peers who have performed their duty to this country. On the contrary, credit has been paid to those men and women of great ability. It has been said that peers are fulfilling voluntary duties and will no longer be able to perform that service. As a former officer of the all-party group for charities and the voluntary sector, I can suggest numerous voluntary organisations that would be pleased to welcome their services.

This debate is about the legitimacy of the second Chamber, and hereditary peers give it no legitimacy. The peers would have had much greater legitimacy if they had been elected or appointed to the second Chamber on their own merits rather than appointed on the merits or otherwise of their forebears. The amendment provides a temporary reprieve. In order to pass important legislation, we have reached a temporary—I stress that word—compromise.

To be honest, I do not particularly like that compromise. In terms of the contents and principle of the Bill, I think it is unnecessary. Most agree that the principle of hereditary lawmakers is outdated and inefficient. However, our commitment to reforming the House of Lords must be viewed alongside our commitment to change and the other promises that we made to the electorate. It is not our only policy.

Mrs. Laing: I understand from her comments that the hon. Lady intends to support the amendment. However, on 15 February this year, she voted against an almost identical amendment that I proposed. How can she reconcile voting against the measure in February and for it this evening?

Angela Smith: I urge the hon. Lady to be patient, because I am coming to that point.

A compromise has been reached, but I would much prefer it if the amendment were not before the House. Reform of the House of Lords is not the only policy that the Government have. We made a commitment to the electorate to get our policies through, and we have obligations to fulfil. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said, we have to take our manifesto seriously. We cannot fail to keep our obligations to the electorate because we are pursuing only the issue of the second Chamber, which is based on those put into position by the actions of their ancestors.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: How many of the hon. Lady's constituents came up to her at the last election and said that, over and above new schools and new hospitals, the one thing that they wanted her to do was to abolish the check on the House of Commons?

Angela Smith: The hon. Gentleman, who I know is in favour of hereditary peerages, makes my point for me. People did not want this issue to be put above the issues of health and education. That is why we have had to accept a compromise to get the Bill through without jeopardising our policies on issues such as health and education.

The nature of compromise means that not everyone is completely satisfied, and I stress that I am not completely satisfied. If everyone were satisfied, it would not be a compromise. The proposal is imperfect, but it is not the end; it is stage 1.

Whenever we debate in the Chamber, we should always have a sense of history. This issue is not just about those who were in this place before us, but about those who will come after us and how we will be viewed in the future. This debate, and the issue that we are debating, will be viewed with some incredulity by those who come after us. They will be incredulous not that the debate is taking place, but that we are holding it now and that it has taken so long to get here.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): When the Government introduced their original Bill, they set out quite clearly their view of its purpose, which was effectively to remove hereditary peers. As a result of the amendment passed in another place, sadly, the Government's purpose has been defeated and we are left with a very diminished Bill. It will certainly greatly change the upper House, but it is far removed from what I think that the Government had in mind and certainly from what Liberal Democrat Members had in mind when we argued that we would introduce and support proposals to end hereditary peerages and the powers of those who had come to the upper House solely by descent.

In the debate that we held courtesy of the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), who tabled an amendment when the House was considering the Bill, it was made clear that the Government's preference was to have the Bill in its original form. The Leader of the House even tonight has suggested that she would have preferred the Bill in its original form. I do not doubt that she is sincere in expressing that view, because it certainly conforms with her political history.

Even if stage 1 of the reform of the House of Lords had gone through as the Government intended, it would not have legitimised the upper House and it would not have made it a House that is appropriate for a modern democracy. Therefore, one has to ask why on earth we approached the reform in that way.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

The experience of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) may be called in evidence. He spoke of the attitude of the Liberal party in 1911 and earlier to votes for women and other issues. It is true that the Liberal party gutted the power of the House of Lords by reducing its role to the mere power to delay, but it did not substantially alter its membership. However, the right hon. Gentleman did not refer to the failure of the succeeding Labour Government and later Labour Governments, including the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member, to effect the democratisation of the upper House. We are entitled to try to learn from that experience.

5 pm

I do not doubt that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, as a member of the Labour Government in which the issue was led by the late Dick Crossman, was firmly of the view that a democratised upper House was appropriate. What has to be said is that it was never regarded as so important that it should be given the full weight of commitment that would have been required to use powers under the Parliament Act to disrupt all other Government business, and to give it the priority over other business that would have been necessary to achieve that democratisation. We have to face that history in deciding how to bring about the democratisation of the upper House.

Mr. Tony Benn: Although the Parliament Act allows us to override obstruction of legislation by the Lords, that House has an absolute veto on statutory instruments. I do not know whether the House realises that, if the Lords vote down an instrument requiring an affirmative vote, there is nothing that the Commons can do about that.

I pay tribute to the work of the Liberal Government, because my father was a Liberal Whip at the time of the Parliament Act, so I know of the struggles that took place, but we have not ever tackled the issue since.

Mr. Maclennan: I want to avoid the trap of giving a lesson in constitutional history or seeking to be totally comprehensive in my elucidation of these issues, thereby sustaining my reputation for a somewhat academic approach. I am anxious to cut the cant.

Mr. Gummer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: I think that the right hon. Gentleman should allow me to make a little progress.

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) is not giving way.

Mr. Maclennan: This is simply the preamble to my speech, and it seems inappropriate to add to it by allowing the right hon. Gentleman to intervene.

We have set ourselves the task of democratising the upper House. I say "we" advisedly because, before the election, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats reached agreement on this matter. I have to ask myself whether the Bill accelerates that democratisation process at all. It takes a modest step in that direction by removing a substantial number of hereditary peers, but it does no more than that. I find the Weatherill amendment, as it is called, insupportable.

Mr. Tyrie: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: No, not at the moment. I am trying to develop an argument.

I do not intend to support the Weatherill amendment. In another place, my noble Friends did not support it and gave their reasons. I am not constrained by the Government's whipping arrangements and therefore feel no obligation to go into the Lobby in support of an amendment that, frankly, will produce a fairly nonsensical arrangement. However, the objective of reform will be advanced to the extent that the new House may be able to participate more constructively in the discussion of the composition and powers of its successor than could a House so hopelessly dominated by hereditary peers as is the present House of Lords.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman enlighten us as to how the current upper House has in any way suggested in its debates or by its actions that it would be unable to co-operate with the Government in coming up with a full range of complete proposals without having to go through this halfway stage?

Mr. Maclennan: I have read reports of the debates in another place. They were not enormously constructive as to the future role or structure of the upper House. I had the sense that the noble Lords were defending their own; they were not considering the matter from the point of view of the electors and the public; they did not consider such matters as the efficacy of the control of the Executive, or the greater legitimacy of the upper House. Legitimacy is a word that does not come easily to the lips of those who are Members of a House by virtue either of patronage or of inheritance. Consequently, the idea that is central to the issue has been almost entirely neglected in the other place. That cannot be so for much longer.

I hope that, increasingly, we shall find common ground. I am very much in agreement with the remarks made by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), when he opened the debate for the Conservatives. We should be trying to create a legitimate upper House that is capable of holding the Executive to account. That must be the role of a proper, reformed upper House.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): What does the Commons do?

Mr. Maclennan: The House of Commons, by virtue of the fact that it is considerably dominated by patronage and by the substantial presence of the Government, is much less capable of holding the Executive to account than an independently elected House of Lords—or senate as we would prefer to call it—would be. For that reason,

I hope that we shall enjoy the support of several Opposition Members for the proposals that we have put to the royal commission on that subject.

I understand the Government's dilemma—in negotiations with the Cecils, it is not entirely unsurprising that they were outsmarted. However, I hope that the result will not be a second House with the structure that would be brought about if the measure were accepted. That would be indefensible in principle, and would do nothing to enhance the authority of the House of Lords with the public. It fails the first task set by the Government—of ending membership of the House of Lords by virtue of holding a hereditary peerage. For those reasons, I cannot commend the amendment to the House and I advise hon. Members to abstain.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): It is pleasing to follow that clarion call for principle—in support of abstention.

I am happy and more than pleased to support the Cross-Bench amendment. In the 1997 general election, my party made a clear manifesto commitment—to seek a two-stage reform for the abolition of the hereditary peers from the House of Lords. That is what the measure will achieve, because 90 per cent. of the hereditary peers will go straight away, and even the other 10 per cent.—those who have been elected to remain in the second Chamber—will also go in the sense that they will no longer be hereditary peers. Their status will change; in effect, they will become life peers and there will be no right to succession. That is sensible government and politics—the achievement of our ends through a pragmatic compromise.

We support that pragmatic compromise because, without it, the whole of the Government's legislative programme would have been delayed or blocked. The abolition of the hereditary peers is an extremely important measure, but it is not important enough to allow all our key programmes—on health, education, public transport and other matters—to be blocked. I could not, in all conscience, have told my constituents that, because we were not prepared to make a sensible compromise, we had lost legislation on significant matters that were included in our general election manifesto.

Mr. Fallon: That is the second time that the allegation has been made that, somehow, the upper House was, or has, or is, intending to block legislative programmes on health and education. What is the evidence for that allegation?

Mr. Rammell: The evidence is very clear. When the crisis in the Conservative leadership in the House of Lords first developed, unattributed briefings in numerous newspaper articles made it clear that that leadership would attempt to use reform of the second Chamber to harry, delay and block legislation. The Government would not have been right to accept that.

Mr. Gummer: How did the hon. Gentleman fail to notice that those in the other House rejected the proposed reduction in benefits for disabled people, which many Labour Members supported? Is he really suggesting that a House that has taken what to many of his hon. Friends seemed a progressive view was likely to hold up legislation on health and education? Surely that is nothing to do with the facts. Is he believing what he reads in the newspapers rather too much?

Mr. Rammell: The former leader of the Conservatives in the House of Lords said that he was prepared to act like a hooligan to block the Government's sensible reforms. Anybody who has considered the issues, listened over the years to the Conservative party and observed the way in which it has defended its vested interest in the House of Lords, would draw the conclusion that it would have used its clear majority in the other place to block sensible Government reforms.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): Perhaps we can nail this nonsense that there would not have been a concerted effort to block legislation in the Lords. Has my hon. Friend forgotten that the leader of the Conservatives in the Lords was sacked for entering into negotiations to achieve a consensus, and precisely because he would not follow a campaign of outright opposition, as the Conservative Front-Bench team in the Commons wanted?

Mr. Rammell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I had forgotten that point, which shows just how long we have been debating the issues.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The hon. Gentleman is mixing his facts. First, he has confused Lord Onslow with Lord Strathclyde. Secondly, I should put on record, as did Lord Cranborne both before and after leading the Conservatives in the House of Lords, that he abided by the Salisbury convention.

Mr. Rammell: I have certainly seen quotations from *Hansard* in the other place that have clearly shown that Conservative peers were not prepared to abide by the Salisbury convention if it did not suit their purposes. I remember specifically one Conservative peer arguing that it was a constitutional outrage to suggest such changes.

Hon. Members: "Who?"

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have shouting across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Fallon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) to say that he remembers quotations, but not to provide them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for debate; it has nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When an hon. Member cites a quotation, do not *Hansard* Reporters ask for the exact version and, if it cannot be provided, it does not go on the record?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I did not hear the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) quote anybody.

5.15 pm

Mr. Rammell: I say explicitly that, following the debate, I shall be more than happy to provide the direct quotation and the exact time when the Conservative peer made the outrageous accusation. The number of interventions and the hostility that I am receiving from Conservative Members reminds me of the saying of the colonel in "Dad's Army":

"They don't like it up 'em."

We are fundamentally challenging the position and interests of the Conservative party.

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): He was not a colonel; he was a lance corporal. Rank is everything in this place.

Mr. Rammell: I promoted him by mistake.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) spoke in support of 100 per cent. direct elections to the second Chamber. I imagine that most Labour and Liberal Democrat Members would instinctively support such a proposal. However, the more that we consider the issue and imagine the results, the more difficult it becomes to envisage such a second Chamber not challenging the supremacy of the House of Commons—not in acting as a legitimate check on the Executive or reasonably and legitimately asking the Commons to revise its proposed legislation, but simply because Members of the second Chamber, who would have a different electoral mandate, fundamentally disagreed with the Government of the day.

I say honestly that I have not worked all my political life for the election of a Labour Government—other Members are in exactly the same position—to see their programme stymied and blocked by a second Chamber that thinks that, simply on the grounds of politics, it is legitimate to oppose my party's election manifesto commitments.

Mr. Allan: I shall not follow the hon. Gentleman in a debate that is properly for the reformed second Chamber. I simply point out that two elected Chambers seems to be the global norm in a bicameral system. Everybody else gets by with two elected Chambers, including the United States.

Mr. Rammell: The Chambers in the United States have very different functions from those proposed and debated here.

The concern that I am expressing about a 100 per cent. elected Chamber is not some novel, new Labour concern. The Brice convention in 1917-18, under Lloyd George, rejected the option of a directly elected second Chamber on the ground that it would inevitably become a rival to the House of Commons. The same concerns were voiced in 1948—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must be careful. We are debating amendments that are far more narrow than his comments. We should try to concentrate on the Weatherill amendment.

Mr. Rammell: I take your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was merely responding to some of the points raised by Conservative Members.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), for whom I have great respect—he knows that I agree with him on matters European—asked why I am in favour of a two-stage process. It is because history teaches us not to trust members of the Conservative party on this issue. Throughout the past 89 years, Conservatives have said, "Of course we are in favour of the notion of a reformed second Chamber, but we need to see what will follow it." The lack of consensus on a second stage has then been used as a means to block reform and the abolition of the hereditary peerage.

Mr. Gummer: If the hon. Gentleman had a leg that gave him pain, would he think it sensible if someone suggested that it should be chopped off before it was decided what should be put in its place? No, he would want to know first what was on offer instead of his defective leg. The hon. Gentleman is offering the House a curious concept: we will get rid of what we have got—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is making a speech, not an intervention.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), has passed between you and the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) and between the hon. Gentleman and a Conservative Member who was intervening. Is that in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall deal with the things that I see and hear. At the moment, I am trying to deal with the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), whose intervention is too long. The best thing would be for the right hon. Gentleman to resume his seat.

Mr. Rammell: Let me answer the point of the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal, by saying that, by agreeing now on the first stage of reform, we shall concentrate minds on achieving the second stage. The past 89 years of history show that, if we abolish hereditary peers now, we are far more likely to get second stage reform than would otherwise be the case.

I hear protestations from Conservative Members—

Mrs. Laing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rammell: I shall finish the point; then I will give way.

I hear protestations from Conservative Members that their integrity is being impugned and that of course they are in favour of reform. I would not ask you to believe me or believe the Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I shall quote to you Lord Chalfont in a debate in the House of Lords, who said:

"One of the things about which I am sorry is that the Conservative government, when they were in power, did not take some steps towards reforming this House."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 October 1999; Vol. 606, c. 225.]

The fact that the Conservative party never took those steps, and certainly never did so in 18 years in government, undermines the Conservatives' claims that they are in favour of reform.

Mr. Tyrie: Lord Chalfont is an ex-Labour Minister who now sits on the Cross Benches. As for the hon. Gentleman's wider points, for the better part of 100 years, the Conservative party has been proposing forms of direct or indirect election to the second Chamber. For much of that period, the Labour party has been proposing complete abolition of the second Chamber, and has done so in three manifestos since 1911.

Angela Smith: Do not quote manifestos.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, I urge the House to get back to the amendments. We must deal with the amendments before us.

Mr. Rammell: I shall follow your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

An accusation has been made that the Labour party and this Labour Government are unfairly using their position to create a significantly increased number of life peers. That fails to take account of what has happened over the years, with the huge Conservative majority in the second Chamber. Are Conservative Members arguing that we should continue to accept that we shall permanently be in a minority position vis-a-vis the Conservative party in the House of Lords?

When we are judging which party is being dogmatic and trying to use the situation in a partisan way, we might make an instructive comparison. We have a Labour Government and a Labour Prime Minister who, for the first time, are giving up the rights of patronage, and are seeking a second Chamber in which no party has an overall majority. Contrast that with the Conservative party in 1979, with Lady Thatcher as Prime Minister. Despite the fact that there was already a significant majority of Conservative peers over Labour peers, she sought to increase the disparity between the Conservative party and the Labour party. That shows which party and which Government are being straight and fair on these issues.

Mrs. Beckett: As the last intervention suggested that the Conservative party's bona fides were demonstrated by having been said to be in favour of some form of different system—perhaps election to the House of Lords—for such a long time, I remind my hon. Friend that, on paper, since 1948, the Conservative party has been in favour of no party having a majority in the House of Lords, but it has added to that majority ever since.

Mr. Rammell: Absolutely. In responding to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, I am very conscious that the word hypocrisy is not allowed to be bandied around in the Chamber, so I choose my words carefully. She makes her point very forcefully.

The nub of the amendments—

Mrs. Laing *rose—*

Mr. Fraser *rose—*

Mr. Rammell: I shall not give way again, because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

The nub of the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), and of some of the concerns expressed by Conservative Members, is that this is not a two-stage process—that the Government will complete the first stage and then things will remain the same for ever and a day. I honestly do not believe that to be the case.

The Government are arguing, on the record, that this is a temporary solution. We are today abolishing the right of hereditary peers to sit in the House of Lords. The Wakeham commission will report by the end of the year, and we have committed ourselves to setting up a Committee of the two Houses afterwards. Given the sequence of events that will flow from that set of propositions, I find it inconceivable that the Labour party will not have to give an explicit commitment, in its general election manifesto, to the second stage of reform. Therefore the Conservatives' accusations are without foundation.

Finally, I would return—

Mrs. Laing: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's passion against the hereditary principle from the arguments that he has made. I can also understand why, despite that, he may well support the Lords amendment this evening out of expediency; but why did he not vote against it when I proposed it on 16 February, when he was free to do so?

Mr. Rammell: The hon. Lady well knows the answer. It is about tactics and practical politics and government. Had we agreed to that amendment at that stage, that would have reinforced those Conservative peers who wanted to block our proposals for reform. The Bill would have returned to this place and, because it was not in its original form, we could not have enforced the Parliament Acts. That seems to me to be perfectly sensible.

Mrs. Laing: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman is consistent. So why did he not vote against it in February? I have just checked, and he did not.

Mr. Rammell: Because I want the issue to be resolved once and for all, after 89 years, and I believe that the Cross-Bench amendment is the most practical and effective way to achieve that.

I finish by returning to the comments of the shadow Leader of the House. The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the common sense that the hereditary peers had shown down the years. In fact, their record has been based not on common sense but on a biased view of life and a degree of political partisanship that is clear for everyone to see, because, by and large, the hereditary peers come from one class, one interest group, with one set of values, and they predominantly support one political party.

[Mr. Rammell]

I am more than happy to pay tribute to the service of some hereditary peers, but please, please, please do not ask me to weep for the ending of a one-sided, partisan one-party racket that has been taking place in this country for far too long.

5.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Parts of that speech by the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), with its class-based attacks, sounded slightly nauseating. I want to place on the record right away my tribute to the service of the hereditary peers, who have done an outstanding job. I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), who began his remarks with a similar tribute.

The old House did work, after a fashion. It was imperfect, but that is true of many British institutions that have grown up over the years, and we should not expect it to be perfect. Now that it has been fundamentally shaken up, I believe that, in the 21st century, there will be no logical stopping-off place short of a democratically elected second Chamber. The majority of Opposition Members probably believe that, and I suspect that a very large minority of Labour Members believe it, too.

However, I am afraid that that does not enable me to support the Blair-Cranborne deal, which has been renamed the Weatherill amendment because Lord Weatherill is a Cross-Bencher and it sounds slightly more cheerful. I shall explain why I shall not support the deal, but first I want to say a few words in support of amendment (b), which stands in my name and those of a good number of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

We have always been told that the Bill is an interim Bill, yet it has never contained even the briefest reference to stage 2 of reform. However, now there is one. Subsection (3) of the Lords amendment says that peers who satisfy the Weatherill conditions shall be excepted throughout their life

"until an Act of Parliament provides to the contrary".

I wonder how that got into the legislation. I wonder what the Government have in mind. We were not enlightened at all by the Minister as to what that Act of Parliament might contain.

I have two views on that wording—one optimistic, one pessimistic. Perhaps in a minute the Minister will tell me which one I should assume to be right. One view is that the Government have started to think seriously about plans for an elected, or largely elected, second Chamber; there are a few reasons for thinking that they might have gone down that road. As I said, there may be a majority in the House for such a proposal. I strongly suspect that there would be, on a free vote. Eighty per cent. of the population support that approach in all opinion polls. Even Lord Wakeham is feeling the need to nod in that direction.

Moreover, that approach is logical. If the Executive wants to create an effective second Chamber, democracy is the only sensible route to take, for only an elected Chamber can hope to challenge the Executive in this place.

However, I am a pessimist. I expect that my pessimism will be confirmed in a moment.

Mrs. Beckett: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will realise that he is straying down an unnecessary diversionary route. I remind him that the proposal was not made by the Government. It was put forward in the House of Lords by a group of Cross-Bench peers, including Lord Weatherill.

I understand that the words to which the hon. Gentleman referred were included to make it clear that this section of the amendment does not confer membership of the Lords in perpetuity to those who are covered by the provision. It gives them legitimacy in the transitional House, but only in the transitional House. One could argue that it is a belt-and-braces approach, referring to the fact that a later Act of Parliament could remove them. That, as I understand it, is the reason for the wording.

Mr. Tyrie: I hope that the right hon. Lady understands her own legislation. The idea that it was drafted by a group of Cross-Benchers in a fit of absence of mind, while the Government hardly knew what was going on, and that the Government will now vote for this rather defective measure is absurd, as is the argument that the origins of the idea lay anywhere else but in meetings between Lord Cranborne and the Prime Minister. It is well documented that back-room deals were done time and again by Lord Cranborne and the then Leader of the House of Lords, Lord Richard, in order to secure the Executive's objectives.

It is scandalous to suggest that this is not a piece of Government legislation. Of course it is. That is why there is a three-line Government Whip to get it through, and why I am pessimistic. The right hon. Lady has made me even more pessimistic about the purpose of the wording of subsection (3). My best guess is that, as she implied, it is a threat to the 92 survivors who have made it through the Blair-Cranborne deal into the lifeboat. The bracketed words tell them that they do not even have life peerages, and that they could be chucked overboard at any moment.

So I come to the wider question of whether the Blair-Cranborne amendment strengthens or weakens the interim House. If the 92 peers could be chucked out at any moment, it would weaken the House. The hereditaries who remain have heard their death sentence read out and seen some colleagues' blood run, and the lucky few have been given a stay of execution. I do not believe that those peers will want to make trouble for the Executive or rock the boat. The Lords have been

"bought off by the short-term survival of 92 hereditaries who are virtually hostages for good behaviour."

Those are the words of a hereditary peer in a letter in *The Daily Telegraph* today.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): My hon. Friend may be right, but there is another explanation as well, which is given by many of the 92 hereditaries. They believe that they can still make a contribution in what would otherwise be a House of cronies. It is unthinkable that peers whose families have been in the other place for up to 500 years are impressed by the prospect of another two year in a House of cronies, just because it gives them some power or prestige. Will my hon. Friend at least do

them the credit of taking them at their own estimation and say that, although he may disagree with them, their motives are entirely honourable?

Mr. Tyrie: I think that the motives of those peers are honourable, and I hope that they will act in that way, but I fear the worst. I fear that they will be all too easily cowed by the threat that they will be booted out if they misbehave. The same goes for the lifers, as they now have an interest in hanging on to the remaining hereditary peers. They know that once the hereditaries have gone, the next thing that will come their way is democracy, which is as much a threat to the life peers as the Bill is to the hereditaries.

I fear that there will be much synthetic opposition from the interim House. There will be some genuine attempts to make it work, but I do not believe that it will amount to a genuine second Chamber playing an effective role—quite the opposite. Once the amendment is on the statute book, the Government and all peers will have a vested interest in minimal further change. Writing the amendment into the Bill will make change less, not more, likely.

There are many other reasons for voting against the amendment. It is "riddled with anomalies", an "artificial fix, a sop", or "a gigantic Pooh trap". Those are the words of three hereditary peers speaking in debate in the House of Lords. They use colourful language in another place—the *Official Report* is well worth reading.

As for the election rules and the rules of procedure, Lord Mancroft said:

"It is ludicrous, it is a farce, it's a complete joke".

He rather spoiled it by going on to say that he would none the less stand for election as one of the 92 remaining hereditaries, "but only reluctantly."

The Blair-Cranborne amendment has nothing to do with what is right for the constitution and everything to do with an understandable struggle for survival by some hereditaries, and a determination by the Executive to minimise any checks to its authority from another place.

It is insulting to the electorate in the 21st century that part of our legislature will be chosen by electoral colleges of 92 hereditary peers. That proposition contains many absurdities, but I shall list just a few.

The electoral colleges that are being created mean that a couple of Liberal or Labour hereditaries will be able to choose who should replace one of their number if he or she dies. Those places in the legislatures will be even more rotten boroughs than Old Sarum or the one whose name I forget, which disappeared into the sea—

Mr. Gummer: As it is in my constituency, I can tell my hon. Friend that Dunwich has not yet disappeared into the sea, and those who live there are, I am happy to say, staunch voters for me.

Mr. Tyrie: I hope that the rest of my right hon. Friend's constituency does not disappear into the sea for a long time. I am always grateful for his interventions.

No provision has been made for the possibility that one of the remaining hereditaries may wish to move from one party group to another. Under the interim arrangements, it is impossible to change parties. I understand that there was not even a serious debate about the matter.

So there is to be some semblance of a legislature—I am not sure whether the Government want a serious legislature—but no proper scrutiny of the election system. We would find that unacceptable in almost any other country. The Clerk of the Parliaments will have the final say on whether the election was held properly and in any dispute about the rules. That is why I tabled an amendment to subsection (6).

I understand that none of the procedure in an election or a by-election for one of those places in the interim Chamber is justiciable. The courts can have no say. If there is a dispute about an election to this place, we can go to the courts, which can scrutinise what has happened. That remedy will be unavailable for those places in the interim Chamber.

We are witnessing a mockery of the second Chamber. The proposals are as unworkable as they are unjustifiable. It is demeaning to the electorate to be asked to put up with that. It is demeaning to all hon. Members that we are being asked to vote for it. It would be a supreme irony if we saw tonight one of the largest majorities in this Parliament, with three-line Whips operating on both sides, for a measure that probably commands less respect and support than any brought before the House in living memory.

Mr. Winnick: We know the hon. Gentleman's views about a democratically elected second Chamber, and we respect those views, even though I do not share his sentiments. Did he listen to his hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who made it clear that he believed the hereditary principle to be more important than the democratic principle, and derided democracy, saying that it was the result of the totalitarian age? That was hardly a speech in favour of democratic principles and parliamentary democracy, to which the Opposition are supposedly committed.

Mr. Tyrie: I find the hon. Gentleman's intervention astonishing. That is not my view. I am giving my view and other hon. Members have theirs, but half the people eligible to do so signed an early-day motion in my name that supports an elected second Chamber. I had discussions with many of my party's Front Benchers and I can assure him that there is widespread support there too. I do not know when my party will come out in favour of an elected second Chamber, but I am reasonably confident that it will do so before the Labour party.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I think that my hon. Friend was in the Chamber when I made my speech. Does he agree that that account of what I said is an absolute travesty? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] My hon. Friends agree with me. I forgive the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) for that travesty because I am afraid I was unable to deliver my speech in the way that I should have liked to have done and it is quite clear that that has caused misunderstanding on the Labour Benches.

Mr. Tyrie: My hon. Friend has fought his corner well and I should perhaps have made a similar remark on his behalf—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not criticising the Chair for keeping the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) in good order.

Mr. Tyrie: We should have had single-stage reform; the two-stage process is quite ridiculous. It is a disgraceful, unjustifiable farce and if that is what the Government mean by—

Mr. Peter Bradley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyrie: No. If that is what the Government mean by modernisation of the constitution, we can do without it. It seems to me that the modern last-ditchers are sitting on the Treasury Bench, delaying further fundamental reform. Now we know what the Prime Minister really meant when he talked about the forces of conservatism, for his Government are keeping the second Chamber in the hands of the few rather than the many. In fact, they are placing it in the hands of the even fewer.

The Prime Minister may talk about wanting to create a young country, but he acts as if he wants to hang on to—

Mrs. Beckett *rose—*

Mr. Tyrie: No, I shall not give way.

The Prime Minister acts as if he is hanging on to an old Chamber.

Mrs. Beckett *rose—*

Mr. Tyrie: I have said that I shall not give way.

I believe that the Government are rigging the constitution. The right hon. Lady had the effrontery to suggest that the Bill will resonate down the centuries. If it resonates at all, it will do so as a Bill that constituted a disgraceful fiddling and rigging of the British constitution. If the Government carry on in such a way, they will be seen as one of the greatest-ever mess-makers in respect of the British constitution. Deals such as that done on the amendment behind closed doors at No. 10 give politicians and British politics a bad name. I, for one, shall not support it.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): I am pleased to support the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), which also stands in my name. It would remove the ability of the rump of hereditary peers to self-propagate in perpetuity by means of by-election. Such a process has its own inherent absurdity, but that is not a distinguishing feature when considered in the context of the Bill. The real vice of the proposal is that it undoubtedly appears to endow the existence of the rump of 90 hereditary peers with a measure of permanence.

According to the Bill, by-elections will occur only on death. I have had a good look at the 90 self-anointed, or self-appointed, recipients of this electoral gain and they all seem pretty fit to me. Therefore, it must be clear that the Bill at least envisages a period of years—perhaps many years—before the so-called transitional arrangement is repealed. That fuels the fear and trepidation felt on both sides of the House that the Bill will become not an instrument for reform, but an instrument for reaction. There is not the slightest doubt that it manifestly, dramatically and obviously increases the power of patronage by removing the countervailing powers of the hereditary peers. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) rightly pointed out, patronage is always the handmaiden of corruption.

5.45 pm

The continued existence of 90 hereditary peers is a wholly inadequate safeguard against that corruption, but the problem appears to be that, as time passes, the existence of such a rump will be perceived to be an excuse for the maintenance of the status quo.

Mr. Fraser: The hon. and learned Gentleman argues that patronage corrupts. To take that a step further, is he suggesting that promotion to the Front Bench in the Labour party should be achieved by election, not patronage?

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Patronage always tends to corrupt. *[Interruption.]* Certainly not. Patronage, in certain circumstances, is a necessary vice. In other cases, it is not, but the tendency to corrupt is counter-balanced in the House by the fact that all Members, whatever Bench they sit on, have the mandate of their own electorate. That is the safeguard here, but it will not be introduced to the other Chamber.

I appreciate that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has signed up to his own self-denying ordinance as to the number and type of peers that he proposes to create. By my calculations, that still leaves him with about 100 to go, so all is not lost in Camelot. He is a luminous and beautiful human being, and I have not the slightest doubt that he will live by that ordinance, but, like all Prime Ministers, he is ephemeral and will pass away in due course. The Bill contains no guarantee whatever that the transitional period will not, in the fullness of time, achieve permanence.

In urging my right hon. Friend to consider adopting the amendment, may I sound a mild word of warning? Governments are rarely put to the sword; almost always, in the due course of time, they fall on their own. The self-inflicted wound, which is most likely to do for this otherwise outstanding Administration, is the public perception of over-rigorous political control. There is no greater exemplification of that than the arbitrary donation of rank and favour by the process of patronage. We are looking at the Achilles heel of the Government, which must be addressed.

We have tabled our amendment so that the Government, by adopting it, can show that we are not embarking on a permanent process, but are on the way to real reform. As far as I am concerned—if I may trespass on your indulgence for a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that reform means abolition of the House of Lords. As far as the House is concerned, we do not need a royal commission to tell us that an elected Chamber and a Chamber arrived at by the process of patronage do not both fulfil a democratic process. Let us have done with them, once and for all, and let us take to ourselves the task of providing the checks and the curbs on the Executive. Let us understand that the continued existence of a House of Lords is an alibi, and only an alibi, for our

own inadequacies. I commend to my right hon. Friend at least the consideration of what I hope is a helpful amendment that will improve the Bill immeasurably.

Mr. Gummer: May I return to the presentation made in support of one of the amendments by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)? He recommended that the House look on democracy in its purest form, but I wonder whether we are rather overdoing it. One remembers that he was removed from his former constituency by the democratic vote. The electorate threw him out, so what did he do? He did not remain to fight the seat, in order to regain it—

Mr. Winnick: Nor did you.

Mr. Gummer: I will return to that parallel. The right hon. Gentleman found another seat, to which he was more likely to be elected. That is a perfectly reasonable thing to do: indeed, I have done it myself. I shall not press the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), because I remember whence he came and where he went.

Those who chose the right hon. Member for Chesterfield as the candidate comprised a small, self-elected group. They chose the Labour candidate in a constituency where the Labour candidate was bound to win. The difference between us is that in my constituency every member of the Conservative party has a vote, and a large number of people were kind enough to choose me. Perhaps those who speak so glibly of democracy ought to look a little more carefully at the various differentiations that appear to be made when people are elected either to the House of Commons or, through the new mechanism, to the House of Lords.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not wish to disturb the flow of the right hon. Gentleman's eloquence, but may I issue a gentle reminder? If he thinks that those who selected my right hon. Friend—or, indeed, him—imagined that the selection was for a safe seat, I can only say that he has wholly forgotten the circumstances of the Chesterfield by-election.

Mr. Gummer: I note that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield has sat there ever since, relatively safely. Moreover, he is leaving of his own volition, not by the choice of the electorate. I am not sure that what I am saying is so far from the truth.

I think that, in discussions such as this, we are sometimes a little extreme in our adherence to theory. The House might do better to consider fact—and the fact is that it is normal for one who proposes a change to suggest what will follow that change. Indeed, that is not only normal but, I think, universal. The right hon. Lady has had some difficulty in defending her case against her own side, not because she is not elegant and eloquent, but because her case is not very good; and her case is not very good not just because of the amendment, but because the Bill is in two stages when it ought to be in one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House is discussing the amendments, not the Bill.

Mr. Gummer: In that sense, the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) is entirely right. He has brought to our attention a fundamental problem that lies at the heart of the Bill, and, although I think that his amendment is wrong, I honour him for recognising that mistake that at the heart of the Bill.

The amendment is wrong because the hon. and learned Gentleman is applying theory to what ought to be practice. Here we are in a society that has found it very difficult to discover what ought to constitute a second Chamber. We have had a perfectly good system up to now, which I defend. I am one of those who see no great need to change what works. It is an old-fashioned view, and no doubt the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) would counter it with theory; but I still maintain that our second House has worked extremely well. Indeed, by and large it has given a more difficult time to Conservative Governments than to Labour Governments. The Leader of the House may laugh, but that is a matter of fact. If she counts the number of amendments that have been made and notes the changes that have been made over many years, she will see that I am right. She must accept, as a matter of fact, that the House of Lords has been tougher with Conservative Governments than with Labour Governments.

Mrs. Beckett: I can only say that, if the right hon. Gentleman thinks that that is a matter of fact, he has seen an entirely different set of statistics from the statistics available to me. In recent years, on average, the House of Lords has defeated a Conservative Government some 13 times a year; the last Labour Government were defeated some 68 times a year.

I accept that the last Labour Government had a very small majority, and, sometimes, no majority. I believe that the current Labour Government, who have a massive majority, were defeated 38 times during the last Session, and that 33 of those defeats were due solely to the votes of Tory hereditary peers. The notion that the House of Lords is tougher on Conservative Governments is by no means borne out by the facts.

Mr. Gummer: I do not think the right hon. Lady is right about that. The truth is clear, not just from the published statistics but from the comments of independent, non-Conservative historians. However, I am happy for the right hon. Lady to say what she thinks, because I doubtless shall not convince her.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No. The hon. Lady has not been present for much of the debate.

The House of Lords enables second thoughts to be had, and that is reasonable. What we are discussing now is whether it is reasonable for it to be done by those who are more than place men and women. I personally consider the hereditary system to be much more justifiable than a system of place men. I find it difficult to understand how it can be more democratic to be in the House of Lords because a politician has decided that one ought to be there than to be there because of who one's father was. If one politician is deciding on all those who are to go into the House of Lords, while a large number of fathers are producing sons, I am not sure that there is not a better argument for the hereditary peerage.

[Mr. Gummer]

What the House of Commons has been offered is not a reform. All that it has been offered is the chance of placating a number of Labour Back Benchers who are upset that the Government have not been able to implement a full-blooded socialist economic policy and give them something to be cheerful about. The abolition of the House of Lords is part of a series of policies led by a Government who know that they can placate those who do not like their economic policies with a series of measures that are class-based and class-ridden.

The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), with whom I agree on a number of issues, gave the game away, as I am afraid he always does. At the end of his speech, it all came out: the same attitudes, and the same concepts. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has ever listened to a debate in the House of Lords. The idea that its Members all have the same concepts and the same attitudes cannot possibly be maintained, not just in general but in particular.

Mr. Rammell: My point was that, by and large, the hereditary peers come from the same background, and have supported one political party over the years—the right hon. Gentleman's party. That is what is fundamentally unfair and unsustainable about them.

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House again that we are discussing the amendments.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for Harlow referred to the amendments in another part of his speech. I was commenting on the part in which he said that hereditary peers always had the same attitudes and the same views, which is manifestly not true.

What we are now discussing is a proposal enabling us to retain some hereditary peers. I am in favour of that, because it means that the second House will not consist entirely of place men, which must be a good thing; but I do not like the way in which it has been arrived at. I think that the explanation advanced by the hon. Member for Harlow was pretty bad from all our points of view. He said that he did not like it, that it was not sensible, but that he and his colleagues thought that it would be a better way of shoving through a lot of Bills. He could not prove that those Bills would not have been passed otherwise; indeed, the opposite appears to have been true. The only peers whom he could mention in that connection seemed not to be the same to whom he had been referring. He gave no quotation. I do not know what *Hansard* will do: I am longing to see the bit of paper that will be sent to him, on which he will be able to specify whom he meant.

6 pm

Mr. Rammell: I am happy to inform the right hon. Gentleman. The specific quotation to which I was referring was from Baroness Young, who said:

"I believe . . . that it is a constitutional outrage to use a manifesto"—

which was put forward during a general election—

"to make a major constitutional change."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 October 1998; Vol. 593, c. 943.]

That statement underlines the degree of unreasonableness of some Conservative peers in the House of Lords.

Mr. Gummer: That is an interesting argument. That quotation is meant to prove that the House of Lords would have stopped Bills on health and education. It has about as much connection to that as the climate change levy has to the reduction in the number of tonnes of carbon in the air: it is totally unconnected. The hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself, particularly as he said that the quotation referred to the leader of the Conservative party in the House of Lords, which it did not, and then that it referred to someone else, which it did not. He has now found it and it does not have any relevance at all. What *Hansard* will do about that I do not know.

The Labour party is uncomfortable about the amendments because, although you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have rightly not allowed us to talk about the generality of the Bill, they go to its heart. They draw attention to the fact that the Government propose abolition without an alternative. Any of the passing decisions that are made are unsatisfactory because they are but partial and do not address the real issue.

Although I do not agree with the solution of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), he is right to draw the House's attention to the fact that the Leader of the House has not got it right. We think the same; our solutions are different. What she should do, although, of course, she will not, any more than she will accept his amendment, is say that, in the light of the amendments, she has had a conversion on the road to Damascus—that she has recognised that it is a constitutional outrage to propose the abolition of a second House without proposing its alternative.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): The reason why the Government will not do that is because they know that the people will always favour change until confronted with the alternative.

Mr. Gummer: That is the last point that I want to come to. My hon. Friend has put his finger on the real issue. I listened with great care to the Leader of the House's explanation of why we are where we are. She gave an historic—

Mr. Leigh: Histrionic.

Mr. Gummer: Not histrionic. She gave an historic view. She suggested that, because it had taken us so long to come to this point, it was reasonable to accept what we now had. Her real answer to the hon. Member for Thurrock was that, because it had taken so long to get here, we may as well accept what we had. I wonder why she has not looked at why we did take so long to get here. The reason is simply that no alternative to the system that we have has found favour with Parliament.

No alternative will find favour with Parliament because there are different views. There are those hon. Members who support the amendment because they do not want an elected House of Lords. Then there are those who support the amendment because they do not want a second House at all. Then there is the hon. Member who supports his amendment because he does want an elected House of

Lords. Then there are the Conservative Members who support the amendment because it is better than what we would have without the amendment.

It is the most miserable collection of supporters for an amendment that I have ever heard of. All of us are voting for it because everything else is worse, but, then, that is true of the Bill as a whole. It is stuck in front of us because there is no alternative. That is serious; it is a constitutional outrage. We are discussing the constitution of the United Kingdom, which has no written constitution and needs its checks and balances. We need those who are not cloned one after the other at a particular moment in time, but who think independently and differently.

One can argue that the House of Lords does not fulfil that role entirely and that we should have a change, but one must argue what that change should be. The hon. Member for Thurrock did at least argue what it should be. In that, he is different from the Leader of the House, who struggled through her speech because she knew that its content was less powerful than its language. She knew that she really did not have a case.

When we go into the Division Lobby, we should support the deal with the House of Lords. There are various reasons why. My own is that it at least retains something that is not in the hands of the Prime Minister; that is a good thing. I will vote for it because it retains some of the hereditary element. I will vote for it because it has some historic continuity—that is a good thing—and because it retains something about which we should think seriously: subsidiarity.

Subsidiarity was invented as a concept by the popes when they were trying to deal with the danger of concentrating all power in one place. Listening to the Labour party, I believe that it has that fault in spades. It really does believe that there is only one way, only one method and only one place where any power should be—over there. That is not true. A society is better run when, even if it is not entirely rational, power is spread a bit, with the opportunity for different people to make different comments about different things.

Mr. Peter Bradley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I will finish my speech.

Over the years, many of the discussions in the House of Lords have been helpful and have contributed very much. The reason why they have contributed very much is precisely the one that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield found so embarrassing: people spoke for themselves in their own person and did not constantly look over their shoulder at others.

We have to do that. It is right; that is why we are here. We should not think of our role in any other way, but that does not mean that everyone who contributes to the legislative system should always have precisely that legitimacy. All the people who do not want an elected House of Lords had better recognise that no other system is as free from opposition as the odd system that we have had up to now.

The only alternative is to put in the hands of a very small number of people—namely, one—the appointment of all those who will make the decisions up there. If we want a collection of clones even more clonic than Labour Members—who are elected—it will be the place men peers in the new House of Lords, as directed by this modernising Government. It is not modernisation. It is the sort of patronage that would have looked out of place and out of date in the 18th century. It is not moving forward. It is moving backwards. At least in the earlier patronage, more than one person made the decision and patronage was found in more than one place. Instead, we are voting for a new second House that will be entirely in the hands of one man, or woman.

The only thing that stands between that and a more sensible system is the group of a few hereditary peers who are to be elected, so I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), who did not support that; I am very much in favour of it. I am sorry only that there are not more of them, so that they can stand out against the constant list of people who have done something and are being paid for it by being put into the House of Lords, introduced three a week to ensure that the only thing that matters is the political balance.

I disagree with the reasons that the hon. Member for Harlow gave for supporting the Government amendment. I do not think that all political decisions are about political balance. The view that we should choose people simply because they are on one side or the other is old-fashioned and pretty nasty.

I like the House of Lords because, very often, many peers who say that they are Conservatives vote with Labour, and many socialists are tough enough to disagree with the current Prime Minister—unlike the Back Benchers in this place, except for the hon. and learned Member for Medway. Most of the Back Benchers in this place do what they are told. I should like to have a House of Lords that never did what it was told. The more hereditary peers we have, the more likely we are to have such a House.

Mr. Peter Bradley: I have never before in the Chamber heard so many weasel words from an experienced politician. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) knows that every attempt to reform our constitutional system, and the House of Lords in particular, has foundered on the inability of the political parties to agree on the second stage. He also knows very well that Conservative Members, who do not have the audacity to defend the hereditary principle, are hiding behind the wispy smokescreen of objecting to two-stage reform.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), who left the Chamber very shortly after his speech, talked about demolition and construction, saying that it was very unusual to demolish an edifice before drawing up plans to rebuild it. However, if the structure is not only ancient but decrepit and dangerous, it would be very sensible to demolish it, regardless of whether plans are on the drawing board to redevelop it.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal used a similar metaphor, questioning whether it would be sensible to cut off one's leg if it was injured and causing pain. I say yes. If a leg is infected, gangrenous and threatens the rest of the body—political or otherwise—it would be very sensible to cut it off, and there is much precedent for doing so.

The House of Lords will be a better place in transition than it has been under the current arrangements. In the transitionary period, it still may not be entirely legitimate

[Mr. Peter Bradley]

but it will certainly be less illegitimate than it has been. It will also hold the promise of a modern Chamber—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no."] Conservative Members reveal their own prejudices—they cannot abide the word "modern".

We had a lecture from the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who took us back to the days of the Teutons and said that we should follow their example of burgeoning democracy. I do not know whether he was talking about the Huns or the Vandals, but their commitment to democracy was not half as impressive as their commitment to demolition.

We need a Parliament that, in both its Houses, is modern and reflects both the composition and the concerns and aspirations of our community. A transitional Chamber will also promise further reform, giving way to a relevant second Chamber that commands respect and serves the public at least as well as, and probably better than, the current institution has done for the past 1,000 years.

The current arrangements are unacceptable in any circumstances. In the course of his lecture, the hon. Member for Wantage—I am sorry that he is not in the Chamber to defend himself, should I misconstrue his comments—seemed to suggest that a valuable aspect of the other place is that many or most of its Members are men of property. He seemed to say that with property should go power and the right to transfer that power within a family from one generation to the next. There is no logic in that. How does that conform to the democratic principle or deliver justice? What is the justification for that system?

The hon. Gentleman was correct in his description of the House of Lords as a place dominated by hereditary peers who are propertied and come from the same social background.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. As I have frequently told the House today, we should concentrate on this group of amendments. That is what the hon. Gentleman should be doing.

6.15 pm

Mr. Bradley: I am trying to argue that we should support amendments producing a transitionary Chamber, in order to create a more democratic upper House than we have now. The provisions will create an upper House without vested interests and without, as is currently the case, a block vote against the Government of the day, who are seeking quite legitimately to exercise their democratic mandate and pursue policies spelled out in their manifesto.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman could certainly argue that the Bill and Lords amendment No. 1 will provide for a different Chamber, but how can he argue that either will provide for a transitional Chamber? Where in the Bill or the amendment is there any commitment or promise to create a reformed Chamber?

Mr. Bradley: At the beginning of his speech, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) talked about a "measure of permanence". I was hoping to be able to challenge him on that expression and ask him if it did not mean temporary, what would constitute a measure of permanence. The Bill's clear intention is to move, in two orderly stages, to a comprehensively reformed upper Chamber. I do not understand why the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) has any difficulty with that.

I also suggest that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks and other Conservative Members have been entirely opportunistic and unprincipled in their opposition to the Bill. Do they want a reformed upper Chamber? In both today's and previous debates, I have had great difficulty in defining exactly what Conservative Members stand for on the issue. If they support a reformed upper Chamber, what did they do in their 18 years in government to bring it about?

It is extraordinary that we should be hearing arguments against a transitional Chamber from Members such as the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal, who belong to a party that has waited 1,000 years for change but now want change to be accomplished at a gallop. They have waited a millennium for change to our constitution and political system, but want it to be completed in the twinkling of an eye. There is a tradition among Conservative Members, and their Tory forebears, of opposition to constitutional reform. They opposed it in 1832, in 1867 and in 1884, until they were forced to accept it.

Today, some Conservative Members have been talking about one man, one vote as if we did not have women's suffrage—which they also opposed. They have had to be dragged kicking and screaming into every constitutional reform that we have ever had in Britain.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: No; I should like to make a little progress and keep my comments brief, so that other hon. Members will be able to speak.

Conservative Members support the upper Chamber because they enjoy an in-built majority in that place.

Mr. Fraser: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Bradley: No, not on that point; but the hon. Gentleman may intervene on the next one, if he cares to.

If Labour had enjoyed for just 10 years the type of majority in the House of Lords that the Conservatives have enjoyed for 100 years, the previous Government would have abolished the House of Lords in one fell swoop.

Mr. Fraser: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: No; I am sorry. *[Interruption.]* I tried to intervene previously in the debate to ask questions, but was not allowed to.

I wanted to intervene, for example, on the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal to ask him which chair in Cabinet he occupied when the previous Government

abolished the Greater London council. Where was he then? Was he arguing for plurality in th debate, which he says is so healthy?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is wide of the group of amendments that we are considering, and many of his arguments would have been better suited to Second Reading. He is not the only hon. Member who is guilty of going wide of the amendments.

Mr. Bradley: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I spoke in the Second Reading debate, and these are just the bits that I could not get in—

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): My hon. Friend used all the jokes in that speech.

Mr. Bradley: Yes; I remember the joke about "The Scarlet Pimpernel". [HON. MEMBERS: "We seek him here."] Yes, but that Pimpernel has now shuffled off to health and I hope that he is faring better there.

I would have preferred a clean break. I would have preferred us to move straight from the present House of Lords to a comprehensively reformed upper Chamber, but matters of constitutional reform are extremely sensitive. They demand deliberation, consideration and, indeed, compromise. Even when a Government enjoy a majority of the size that we enjoy, there has to be room for compromise; but I would rather we have this change than none at all. For that reason, and despite its flaws, I shall support the Weatherill amendment.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): I will be brief, as I spoke when the amendment was last before the House. Then, it was ably proposed for the Conservatives by my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing).

I partly disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie)—I am sorry that he is not here at the moment—but I strongly agree with him on two points. The first is in the tribute he paid to the work, dedication and contribution to our public life that the hereditary peers have made for many years. I pay a personal tribute as I was delighted that my non-voting constituent, Earl Ferrers, came top of the poll among the elected Members. That really is a tribute to his service on both the Back and Front Benches, but mainly on the Front Bench, for many years.

Secondly, I agree with my hon. Friend that the biggest charge against the Bill is that we are to get phase 1 without phase 2, which is fundamental to the amendment. That argument was ably made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). It has been made time and again throughout our debates on the Bill; it is supported by many commentators outside the House; and many people across the country have latched on to the argument.

The Leader of the House attempted to justify the situation in her opening remarks by saying that she very much hoped that there would be agreement on how to proceed to stage 2, so it was most unlikely that the mechanism of by-elections would ever need to be used. That mechanism is the point of amendment (c), tabled by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay).

However, the right hon. Lady later introduced a note of caution, giving herself a considerable let-out when she admitted that there might never be agreement on how to proceed. That is terribly important. She attempted to justify phase 1 without phase 2 on the ground that the Government had to break the log-jam of delay in reform of the past 89 years. The hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) made the same point and suggested that Conservative Governments had delayed reform. In the 15 years since 1945 that previous Labour Governments were in power, they did not make any moves either. They attempted to do so on one occasion, but failed totally.

The biggest problem, and the cause of what the right hon. Lady described as the log-jam, has always been phase 2. That is why there has been no agreement on how to reform the House of Lords since the Parliament Act 1911. The argument about what should replace what we are putting in place through the Bill remains most germane. We are going towards the end of a plank with no idea of what is at the end of it and may well stay on the end for a very long time.

I suspect that there will be no phase 2 for a long time. As for the amendment, we must proceed on the basis that there is a considerable probability that there will be no phase 2, or at least not in the lifetime of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) as he put it, although I, too, hope that that will be a long time. We have heard some indication of that from those on the Labour Back Benches. That fact is very much in everyone's minds as we consider what we are putting in place.

If that is, indeed, the case, as I believe it will be, the biggest threat that we face is an increasingly appointed second Chamber. Reference has been made to the fact that 171 life peers have been appointed by the present Prime Minister—a high proportion in only two and a half years. I have heard rumours from more than one quarter recently—I have no idea whether there is any truth in them—that the Prime Minister is minded to appoint 200 life peers as part of the millennium celebrations. That may or may not be true—it has a certain resonance—but, even if it is not true for that occasion, one can well imagine that that is precisely the sort of thing that the Prime Minister would be tempted to do on another occasion, not least if the country had the misfortune to find him Prime Minister after the next election. It is the sort of step that he might well take, if he had a second victory, shortly after the election when it could be done swiftly without being a feature of the election campaign after that. That is a particular threat because the Government are yet again refusing to allow a statutory appointments commission to be included in the Bill. One must ask why. Naturally, one suspects that they do not want such a commission because the Prime Minister's pledge not to have patronage of his own could easily be broken and he might not necessarily follow it through later. We only have his word for it.

Therefore, the threat of an increasingly appointed second Chamber remains strong. That is why I support the Lords amendment. At least it preserves the element of independence and experience until we get to phase 2. It is that independence which is so important. As long as there is a risk of an increasingly fixed Chamber, the 92 hereditary elements are vital. As we may well have phase 1 for so long, I totally reject the amendment tabled

[Mr. John MacGregor]

by the hon. Member for Thurrock, which could mean an increasingly small number of hereditary peers in the Chamber.

As for the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester, I do not believe that because the hereditary peers who have been elected by their peers have the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads—ultimately, the abolition of the right of hereditary peers to sit in the House of Lords—they will be as unwilling to be independent as he suggests. I think that those peers who are allowed to stay under the amendment will be independent. My hon. Friend argued that they would not be able to exercise real power because of the sword of Damocles.

This is an argument not about composition but about the powers of the House of Lords. The House of Lords would not be able to use any more powers than they have at present.

Mr. Tyrie: It is not a question of power—the Lords already have adequate powers. It is a question of whether they have the moral authority to exercise them. The present House does not have the moral authority and nor will the interim House have it; that is why I favour democracy.

Mr. MacGregor: That is looking to the long term. I am talking about the situation in the interim—it could be a very long interim—until we get phase 2. The powers are not changed. The House of Lords has been willing to exercise the limited powers that it has, and I do not envisage that the hereditary peers will be any less willing to exercise them during the next interim phase. It is much more important for them to be there to exercise the powers that they have than to have a Chamber that is appointed increasingly by the Prime Minister. As my hon. Friend knows, I think that one crucial element of the reform of the House of Lords is to increase its powers. That is at least as important as its composition, but that is not an argument for today.

I agree with some of my hon. Friend's criticisms of some elements of the election of hereditary peers under the Bill. Of course, it is not an ideal solution. The Bill is far from an ideal solution itself, but, because the Lords amendment would improve it to a certain extent, I support it.

6.30 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): I rise to support the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), and to speak against the Lords amendment. I did not like it when we debated it earlier this year and I do not like it any more now. It is unappealing to be asked to support it, because it would establish a non-democratic second Chamber with the power to renew itself. No timetable is offered for the existence of the new, non-democratic second Chamber.

Although I am grateful for the assurances of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that we will proceed to a second stage, there is no indication of what that second stage will be. If the Government intend to proceed to a second stage, I do not understand why the Bill does not say so. That would give us an assurance that the situation is an interim measure. It may be the Government's intention—I hope that it is realised—to proceed to a second stage, but, without such an assurance, we shall be passing legislation that will create a new second Chamber that lasts until it is repealed. That makes the amendment one of enormous consequence. It would change our constitution permanently, because it does not say that it is a temporary measure.

I am also confused by the reference in the amendment to the method of election, because that election took place last week. Perhaps I am being dim, but I am not sure under what powers that election took place. Was it a legitimate election? Where was the debate in this House that decided the basis on which those peers should be elected? I shall give way to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House if she wishes to intervene and explain under what power the Lords went through that election last week. It seemed to me to be an illegitimate election. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office winds up, he will explain whether the election last week was legitimate.

Sir Patrick Cormack: It is clear that if the House should reject the amendment, that election will be null and void. In that sense, it was a provisional election. If the House upholds the amendment, the election will be upheld.

Mr. Fisher: The concept of provisional action by this Chamber or the other Chamber is new and interesting. Those actions have not been determined by Act of Parliament. I am not aware of this provisional procedure.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Much of our European legislation is drawn up in that way. Ministers decide on the continent through the royal prerogative and we have to rubber-stamp their decisions back here.

Mr. Fisher: I am not sure that the election last week was decided under royal prerogative. It seemed to be an invention dreamed up by the Lords, perhaps in anticipation of the passing of the Bill. My understanding is that we have to pass legislation before we can act on it. That does not seem to have happened in this case.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Nobody has acted on the legislation. The Lords have made a provisional decision, acting according to their Standing Orders. Unless and until the Bill receives Royal Assent, the results of those elections will not take effect.

Mr. Fisher: I do not know which of their Standing Orders give the Lords the power to structure such an election. They seem to have acted ultra vires. To say that the election is provisional and that we may give it retrospective legitimacy by passing the amendment seems an extremely unsatisfactory way of conducting parliamentary business. I suspect that it is also illegal. I can see no legal basis for the election that happened in the other Chamber last week.

I should like to return to the reasons why the amendment makes me apprehensive. My right hon. Friend was honest and straightforward with the House in her opening remarks. When explaining the background, she conceded that it may be difficult to find a basis of agreement for the second stage. Having heard the many debates in this Chamber earlier in the year, that seems to

me to be the understatement of the year. There are almost as many views on the best form of a second Chamber as there are Members. I tried to canvass cross-party support earlier in the year for an early-day motion calling for a directly elected second Chamber. Many of those who put their names to the motion did so for a variety of motives, because there are so many views.

The fact that there may not be agreement, however, makes it all the more important that the Government should provide leadership and not wait to be told by Lord Wakeham or anybody else. They should give a clear lead and say how our democracy ought to proceed. The Government have an electoral mandate and one of the largest majorities in living memory. They should set out the principles on which they believe the second Chamber should be based and put them before both Chambers.

Mr. Leigh: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we should let off the handbrake of electoral reform with no idea of where we are going to drive to?

Mr. Fisher: On the contrary, I am making a plea for leadership from the Government about where we should be going and for that view to be debated by Parliament. That is how we should proceed. If we wait until we have the consensus that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House understandably seeks, we shall never reach agreement. That leads me to be even more apprehensive about the permanence of this very unsatisfactory amendment.

Subsection (4) refers to what happens in the event of death. Those of us who have looked at our noble colleagues in the other Chamber know that they seem to be a fairly healthy lot. I hope that none of them is going to die in the near future, but we are being asked to pass legislation that anticipates how we shall replace those hale and hearty people in the event that they die. That also smells to me of worrying permanence.

Mrs. Beckett: I know that my hon. Friend is being fair. However, I should point out that it was anxieties in the House of Lords among those who, for some inexplicable reason, mistrust the Government's motives that led to the provision being put in. The Government did not think the provision necessary.

Mr. Fisher: I am delighted to hear that. However, we are being invited to vote for that view of the House of Lords, which I do not find appealing. I also suspect that the new members of the second Chamber, who will be sincere men and women trying to do a good public job, will not be terribly anxious to have an early second stage, which would remove them just as they were getting used to their powers and getting good at exercising them.

The amendment is dangerously permanent and we have to assume that it will be with us for a considerable time. Our democracy has always been incomplete, and the amendment does not complete it as it should; it simply delays that completion. It reforms the second Chamber, but only by replacing a less than legitimate system with another, equally illegitimate system. In a democracy, the only legitimate basis for a house of representatives is the ballot box, which represents the view of the public. We are here because of the views of our electorate and so should Members of any other Chamber be. I am baffled that right hon. and hon. Members who owe their position and their right to speak here to the fact that they have been sent here by the electorate can argue against the democratic principle.

There can be only one form of legitimacy for the other Chamber, and that is direct democratic elections. At stage 2, we can debate the form of such elections, the nature of the constituency and the powers of the other Chamber. They should be powers of scrutiny and restraint on the Executive, not challenging the House but complementing and strengthening it. But that is a debate for another day. However, the amendment puts in place a non-democratic Chamber, and that is upsetting.

In this debate, we have not heard about the rights of the electorate. In determining here the form of the second Chamber, there is no mention of the electorate. The only people who have been voted for in the second Chamber are 90 men and women who happen to be hereditary peers. The public who sent us here have no rights at all; they continue to be excluded. They have no voice in half our democracy, and that is entirely unsatisfactory.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House in her peroration said that this was a great reform. It should be an historic moment at long last to complete the loop of our democracy and ensure that whoever passes the laws of this country is sent to these Chambers by members of the public at their behest and can be removed by them; but the amendment does not do that, and it cannot have my support.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) on his speech setting out the case for an elected second Chamber, and I agree with him. I also very much enjoyed the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young). He made an excellent case for voting against the measure, but I gather that that is not the instruction. Never has there been a measure for which so many will vote with as many reservations as have been expressed this evening.

Nothing that I say is intended to be in any way derogatory of the peers who have already been elected under the system in the measure. I was delighted that peers such as Earl Ferrers and the Lords Strathclyde, Trefgarne and Denham have been elected. They are great servants.

I was equally delighted by another development. A year ago, for some reason, the Home Secretary attacked Lord Ampthill by name. He said:

"we witnessed the risible spectacle of the fourth Baron Ampthill . . . claiming to speak for the British people . . . what right has Lord Ampthill or any other hereditary peer to sabotage the decisions of this elected House?"—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 959.]

I am glad to say that under the system that the Home Secretary has supported and introduced, Lord Ampthill has been elected as a permanent hereditary peer in the other place. But that is probably the best that I can say about the measure.

6.45 pm

To make the obvious point, which should not be ignored, we are debating the principle of the change, not what is best for existing members of the House of Lords.

[Sir Norman Fowler]

We are debating the make-up of the kind of second Chamber that we want. Against that criterion, the proposition in the amendment is complete rubbish.

I well understand that Labour Members claim a mandate for the abolition of hereditary peers. I have fought every election since 1970 and I cannot remember the issue having come up once in any public meeting that I have conducted. Nevertheless, they claim a mandate for it. But few Labour Members can claim a mandate for the kind of proposition in the new clause, which states:

"At any one time 90 people shall be excepted from section 1"—

that is abolition—

"but anyone excepted as holder of the office of Earl Marshal, or as performing the office of Lord Great Chamberlain, shall not count towards that limit."

I am sure that that was explained carefully in Liverpool and Lambeth during the election.

Few Labour Members would have set out the extraordinary idea that hereditary peers would have to circulate election addresses among their colleagues. One wonders whether at some stage the same will be necessary for life peers. If it is, the mind begins to boggle at the possibilities. I can see messages coming forward such as, "I was Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990 and nothing much good has happened since", and other election addresses of that kind.

Even Labour Members would not have come up with the by-election system for replacement of those who were elected but have prematurely kicked the bucket. As I understand the system, if one of the two elected Labour hereditary peers dies, the one surviving member selects his successor. That must be the minutest and most select electorate that we have ever put in place.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: I shall not for a moment. With the greatest respect, I do not think that my hon. Friend has been here for long.

Mr. Viggers: Yes, I have.

Sir Norman Fowler: All the same, I shall not give way.

In my national service days—I can speak to my hon. Friend in that way because we were at college together—there was a saying, "A joke's a joke, but I'm against a pantomime", although it was put rather more directly than that. We must understand how we have ended up with the new clause. At this point, there is a wise nodding of heads—a pragmatic compromise, I think one hon. Member called it. More unkindly, it could be described as a fix by political fixers. That is what has taken place, and I use the term with no admiration whatever. The Government wanted to get their legislation through without trouble. They were prepared to throw a bone to the Lords, but the bone was on a piece of string and would be hauled back if the Lords overdid their opposition to measures such as the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

The issue then became, as so often these days it regrettably does, an issue of spinning. Would it be the Government who got the blame for giving in on the principle of total abolition, or would it be the Opposition parties for going quietly and giving up on the fight?

I say this in parenthesis—it has been touched on and I may be in a better position than most to know some of the things that took place—but one of the worst features of the affair has been the way in which the issue has been decided behind closed doors before the debate could be properly joined, or before people and hon. Members had the opportunity to come to a position—a point made by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay).

I have in mind particularly the part played by Lord Cranborne. When Lord Cranborne agreed to the deal he did so without the authority of the leader of the Conservative party, without the authority of the special committee that had been set up inside the shadow Cabinet to deal with the issue, without the authority of the shadow Cabinet and without the authority of the parliamentary party. For those reasons, he was rightly sacked from the shadow Cabinet. As a member of the committee in question, I would take some persuading to vote for what, in effect, as has already been said, is the Cranborne deal.

But I have even less intention of voting for the amendment on the basis of the choice that we have today. From now on, one of two courses will be followed. The Government may keep their word and reform will take place, in which case the system being proposed today will almost certainly fall to the ground and become a deal not worth the making.

One of the biggest fears in the debate has been that the alternative system will continue because the Government will find the reform too difficult to carry out. We will then be stuck with the worst of every conceivable world—a predominantly appointed House of Lords. That is the position we have been left with—90 or so hereditary peers, dwarfed by the appointed Members.

Some will say that there is nothing wrong with that. We know from the diaries of Lady Richards—which we have all enjoyed—that the Home Secretary believes in an appointed House. He showed that by appointing his own special adviser to it. It is no longer an accident of birth. The argument is that these are men of undoubted distinction and they are being appointed entirely on their merits.

I have been around the table when some of these decisions have been taken, and I must say that it is possible to be too distinguished. If a Cabinet Minister, a European Commissioner or a member of the successful 1966 English football team is mentioned, the Leader of the Lords will say that that person will never have time to come to the House of Lords—"He is too distinguished". He then puts forward the name of Smith, a junior Whip with the best possible division record as a

Back Bencher. He voted for Government policies when they were put forward and, with an equally clear conscience, voted when they were abandoned later.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): A sound man.

Sir Norman Fowler: Indeed. In case anyone thinks that this is confined to one party, we know that Labour has asked new life peers to sign a declaration that they will turn up to vote. They have had to go to that extreme.

Mr. Fraser: I would like to draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the fact that the top Labour fundraiser, Lord Levy, has missed 105 of the 160 Divisions in the Lords. Lord Bragg—who came into the House, according to the Government, to help to change it radically—has missed half of the votes that he could have attended. The Prime Minister's great ally, Lord Simpson, has voted six times out of 157. The billionaire Lord Sainsbury, now a Minister, has managed 38 out of 161 division, and the billionaire Lord Haskins, another Labour donor, has yet to vote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We cannot have an endless list.

Sir Norman Fowler: I would like to assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that although my hon. Friend makes my case much more eloquently than I could, there has been no collusion between us. It has to be said that, on our side of the Lords, there are also doubtless those who do not turn up.

Mr. Fisher: Surely not!

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman may disagree. However, the Government are making more permanent that sort of system—the system for which Labour Members will be voting.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said that the debate on this new clause could have been avoided had the Government set out what their alternative second Chamber was. Throughout the debate, we have been in a fog as regards where the Government want to go. The trouble is that the Government themselves do not know—they have no idea. Again, the diaries of Lady Richards tell us that some are for an elected assembly, but the Prime Minister and others are not.

It is the job of the royal commission to make sense of this, and I hope that it will come forward with a clear report and proposals, not some compromise which manages to achieve an uneasy agreement among the members of the commission.

I oppose the new clause for these reasons. The Government can claim a mandate for change in the second Chamber, but they have no mandate for this dog's breakfast of a new clause. As a temporary measure, it borders on the ridiculous. All its defects have been set out by Members on both sides of the House. As a more permanent measure, it is utterly indefensible.

If we are to have elections—which I support—the electorate cannot conceivably be the closed electorate envisaged in the new clause. If we are to have elections for the second House, the public should decide. An elected House means a House elected by the nation. Having started on this course, that is the goal at which we should be aiming.

Dr. Ladyman: This has been a strange debate. I do not think that I have ever heard the official Opposition take up so many positions in such a short time, and I am still not entirely sure what their position is. Some Opposition Members seem to support the amendment, while others do not. There is no harm in that—it is reasonable. Labour Members are equally divided.

However, even Conservative Members who support the amendment have not described it as good or pragmatic. At least we recognise it for what it is—a pragmatic amendment, intended to achieve a specific purpose. Whether we like it or not, we see the benefits of that pragmatism.

We have heard much about the independence of the hereditary peers, and much about place men and cronies. Is it not extraordinary that everybody in the other place who represents the Labour party is a place man or a crony, while all those in the Lords who support the Conservatives—and there are a lot more of them than there are Labour Members—are free-thinking individuals? Were they free-thinking individuals when they were bussed in to support the poll tax? Were they free-thinking individuals when they were bussed in a few months later to vote it out again?

Were Tory peers free-thinking individuals when they came in to the Chamber to support the Maastricht treaty? I suspect that they would pay their own bus fare if they had the chance to vote it out again now. The comments of Conservative Members about the need to preserve hereditary peers because of their free thinking and independence are hot air. They have no substance or credibility.

Opposition Members have said that the reforms should not go forward, as there would not be attempts in the Lords to block Government legislation if the amendment were not included. They seem to have airbrushed from history the fact that Lord Cranborne was fired for not being willing to oppose the policy outright. They seem to have erased from their memories all the comments made from the Opposition Front Bench about their determination to oppose these reforms. They seem to have forgotten many of the statements made on Second Reading and earlier, when many Opposition Members were clearly arguing for the retention of the hereditary peerage.

We have heard today that we needed both stages of reform at once. Does anyone seriously believe that if we had proposed a complete reform of the House of Lords in one stage, the Conservatives would not be opposing it today, hook, line and sinker, and that they would not have fought it every step of the way through the House of Lords?

Stage 2 reform will happen. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] I hope before the general election—although that is extremely unlikely. However, we have said that we are committed to putting stage 2 reform in our next manifesto, as have the Liberal Democrats. The Conservatives have now said that they are committed to putting it in theirs. Unless Lord Burford forms a political party and wins the next general election, the second stage of reform will happen. I think that it will happen within a few years,

[Dr. Ladyman]

so we should base our policies on that. We should start the debate now. One of the advantages of having the debate as part of the next general election is that we will be able to get some of the views of our electorate on what shape the new House of Lords should take.

7 pm

The amendment is pure pragmatism. I want to make some comments to my hon. Friends who have spoken against it. I do not believe that the Bill has been improved by the amendment, but I believe that we will get our Bill because of it. By being prepared to compromise and accept it, we have got several of our other Bills through the House of Lords. The Leader of the House mentioned the Food Standards Bill and the Railways Bill. They were the tip of the iceberg because there are also other Bills that we would have lost if we had had to fight this all the way through the House of Lords. It is pure pragmatism.

Unfortunately, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is not in his place. I reminded him on Second Reading of the years when he used to tour the country telling Labour party members how it would be necessary to create 1,000 life peers to vote the House of Lords out of existence. He used to tell us that that was the only way we could do it. Today, he tells us that neither hereditary nor life peers have any legitimacy and so we must get rid of them all as quickly as possible. Why was it better to create 1,000 life peers without legitimacy than to allow 92 hereditaries to stay for another a year or so to get our Bill? We have achieved something that the party of which I am proud to be a member has been trying to achieve since the day it was set up. We are within hours of that historic achievement, purely as a result of a piece of pragmatism.

I do not believe that this pragmatism has improved the Bill, but it has made it possible for us to get our Bill. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) described the amendment as a dog's breakfast. If one wants to feed a dog, a dog's breakfast is sometimes the best thing to have. We have never denied that the amendment is anything other than pure pragmatism. It makes the reformed Chamber less legitimate than I would like, but a lot better than it would be without it. I shall support the amendment, as I shall support the Government as we bring through stage 2 reform and finally achieve the goal of a reformed Chamber and the end of all the hereditary peers.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am disappointed this afternoon. I had hoped that, even at this 11th hour, the Government would think again, do what most people thought that they would do and abolish the House of Lords once and for all. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) pointed out that the only legitimate second Chamber is a directly elected one. I can find no excuse to vote for the amendment tonight. I certainly shall not abstain. I shall vote against, because I do not believe that anything else makes sense.

The hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) suggested that the amendment was a temporary measure. He is not here, but I asked him in the Corridor what he meant by temporary. He said "Anything but permanent." It could have been a decade or 50 years, but he did not want anything that suggested permanence. The problem for most of us is that there is a sense of permanency about the amendment. There is an element of doubt even in the minds of the most ardent supporters of a compromise. They must have serious reservations about the amendment's implications.

Other hon. Members have paid tribute to the other House and the hereditary peers. I have had the pleasure and privilege of serving with many of them on the Council of Europe and the Western European Union. The likes of Lord Ponsonby, Lord Newall, the Earl of Dundee, Lord Grenfell and many others have put in distinguished service in the House of Lords and outside it on behalf of all parties in Parliament. They will be sorely missed, but if we had gone for a democratically elected second Chamber, they would have had the opportunity to seek election to it and continue their work. The suggestion that there is some benefit in allowing 92 hereditaries to remain is nonsense. It is a stitch-up—tokenism. We are trying to avoid dealing with the issue.

The hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) talked about how many electors had told her that they wanted the matter at the top of the Government's agenda. My mind goes back to the days when I used to listen to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) speaking to Labour party meetings, when I was a member of that party. I well remember his speech in which he said that we needed to create 1,000 life peers to abolish the House of Lords. He used to go on to say that we would then establish a democratically elected second Chamber. He wanted the 1,000 peers to be created only for that moment to get rid of the second Chamber altogether. How right he was. It was right then, and the overwhelming majority of people recognise that. People did not queue at my advice centre, or on the campaign trail in 1997, 1992, 1987 or 1984 to say that they wanted the matter high on the agenda. Most thinking people, the overwhelming majority of people, expected the Labour party to abolish the House of Lords and create in its place a democratically elected second Chamber. That is the failure.

The Leader of the House and others have said that the reason that they did not pursue that endeavour was because they would have been held to ransom. She said that they would have lost precious legislation. She was probably right. There would have been some delay. I do not think legislation would have been lost because I do not think that the House of Lords and its Members would have wanted a confrontation with the nation. Does she seriously maintain that the hereditary peers, the House of Lords and the Leader of the Opposition would have advocated to the nation that there was a legitimate role for them to frustrate a Government with a 170-seat majority simply to keep unelected people in office? I do not believe it.

There is a second and more compelling reason. Some people were nervous about what would happen with a democratically elected second Chamber. They thought that the ballot box would not deliver what they wanted and looked for excuses for not going down that line. That will be the stumbling-block over the next few years, as they try to create a second Chamber that will deliver what whichever Government are in power want. The ballot box is not prone to doing that. Many of us who have been in the House and out again have suffered from that. Governments would suffer, as they do in the United States

and many other places with democratically elected second chambers. The people have the habit of going against the Government of the day in second chamber elections. The distinct possibility of that happening is what made the Prime Minister and others nervous and take the cautious line that I think will turn temporary into semi-permanent. We will end up with a stitch-up. We will not have improved Government or scrutiny. We will not get better Government by flooding the place at the millennium with another 200 life peers, as someone speculated that the Prime Minister intends. That will not make anything better. What I suspect that the House will vote for tonight will diminish not only the second Chamber, but this Chamber. This country will get worse, not better, government. That is a denial of what most of the nation's electorate expected the Labour Government to deliver.

We are to have a second-rate solution to first-class problem, but what we in this country need is the support and the conviction to ensure that, sooner rather than later, we get a democratically elected second Chamber. I am sure that there will be endless debates in the royal commission now sitting—and the next, as I am sure that the first will not come up with a solution that satisfies everyone.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central suggested that people had envisaged at least 659 varieties of future second Chamber and he pleaded for the Government to give a lead. The Government cannot start from a better position than the premise that they want the new second Chamber to be established soon, to be democratically elected and to be doing a job that the people of this country believe is worthy of it. Instead, if we support the Government motion tonight, we shall downgrade the second Chamber and, in so doing, diminish this House and the democratic processes of this country.

Mr. Forth: Every now and then in a debate such as this comes a moment of truth or revelation that sets the subject in context. That moment came, somewhat surprisingly, in the speech of the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), who revealed what we all knew but no one had dared to say out loud: that the amendment is the result of a rather sordid and dirty deal done—mainly by the Government, but with the connivance of others—to get the fag end of the Government's ill-managed legislative programme through. To achieve that, we are being asked tonight to alter our constitution and our legislature irrevocably.

That strikes me as one of the most disgraceful suggestions that I have heard in my time as a Member of Parliament. It certainly contrasts with the high words used by the Leader of the House, who spoke of solutions for the millennium and claimed that, for centuries to come, people would praise us for what we are about to do. It is as well that she did not have to listen to her hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet before making that opening speech, because, thanks to the hon. Gentleman, we now know the real truth. We are being asked to alter the upper Chamber—the second part of our legislature—to fulfil a grubby deal done partly to save some skins, but mainly to enable the completion of an ill-managed legislative programme. That is what the hon. Gentleman says, and I believe him.

Mr. Nicholls: I accept the accuracy of my right hon. Friend's account of the motivation of Labour Members, but does he agree that the motivation of those hereditary peers who are to remain might be entirely different? Might they not be telling themselves that they could not have prevented the Government from getting their legislation through because the Parliament Act would ultimately have ensured its passage? Will my right hon. Friend at least entertain the possibility that some of the 92 are, out of a sense of duty, trying to make a thoroughly bad system work slightly better than it would otherwise have done?

Mr. Forth: Of course I accept that and, like my hon. Friend, I impute to the hereditary peers only the highest motives. However, I dispute whether what has been done is a proper solution for our legislative process, for our constitutional arrangements and for the long-term benefit of the country. Those are the things that matter, not pleasing a few people or accepting that their motivation is honourable, for such things are merely temporary.

I should have thought that we should be discussing a long-term proper dispensation for the governance of the country. Regrettably, the debate has been reduced to far less than that. We have ended up being asked to accept a peculiar arrangement whereby hereditary peers are elected—not properly elected, but elected by each other—and so are allowed to continue to be part of the legislative process. That strikes me as containing a greater number of contradictions than I would ever have thought possible, but it is all that is on offer tonight.

7.15 pm

It pains me to say it, but I accept the thrust of the argument advanced by the Labour party ever since the changes that we are now making were proposed. Labour started from the proposition that the upper House as it has hitherto been constituted is an affront to democracy. I accept that, even though I have always been prepared to defend the hereditary arrangement in the form that it has taken until now. I have no problem defending the long-standing hereditary element of the House of Lords; but, that having been swept away, I move to asking what the alternative is. The odd thing is that, if I accept Labour's original proposition, I have to adopt Labour's analysis and say that an upper House composed of appointees is also an affront to democracy.

Mr. Peter Bradley: I should be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman clarified his position. In an intervention earlier in the debate, he said that patronage corrupts both the granter of the patronage and the recipient. If the argument that patronage corrupts can be used against life peers, it can be used also against hereditary peers. Where does the right hon. Gentleman stand on the hereditary principle in the current constitution of the House of Lords?

Mr. Forth: Unusually for me, I have not intervened in the debate, but sat patiently and listened carefully, so I did not say what the hon. Gentleman says I said—I may well agree with it, but I did not say it. In any case, my point is far more fundamental: if we are to rest the argument on what is or is not democratic, we cannot accept the continuation of an appointed element in a part of our legislature; nor can we accept the continuation of a rump of hereditaries who must, by definition, be an

[Mr. Forth]

affront to democracy, as the Government told us from the start. Having those hereditary peers electing one another in some peculiar way makes their presence no less of an affront unless we redefine democracy and say that the electorate is not the people at large, as we all thought that it was, but can comprise the hereditaries themselves. That cannot be right, yet that is what we are being asked to accept in the amendment.

I cannot accept the amendment, or any part of it. I cannot accept the continuation of life peers in the upper House, although I realise that that is not the subject of our debate. It strikes me as bizarre that people who give large donations to a political party can, as a result, end up as part of the legislature; that is neither acceptable nor democratic. Neither do I accept the continuation of an hereditary element.

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): Does the right hon. Member accept that many hereditary peers are Members of the House of Lords precisely because their ancestors gave money to the Conservative party? Indeed, that category includes many of those who were elected by their fellow peers to continue to sit in the Lords. For example—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not a general debate on the hereditary principle. We are debating the amendment.

Mr. Forth: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Simply because something happened in the past does not legitimise it now. Is the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) suggesting that it does? If so, and he believes that past events legitimise the giving of peerages to those who have made donations, that is a development that we do not want to pursue, do we, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The other arguments expressed in the group of amendments are even more bizarre. One appears to be that the peculiar European principle of the list should now be imported into the composition of our Upper House. It is suggested that if, alas, one of the elected hereditaries passes on, the next one on a list should automatically fill the position. I do not find that an acceptable principle—even though, much to my regret, it has already crept into our politics—and I do not see why we should legitimise it or revalidate it tonight.

Even more peculiar is the concept of a by-election. The process is not defined anywhere in the amendments, apart from a single reference to a by-election; nor is there any description of how it might work. It has been suggested that such matters would be adequately covered by Standing Orders in another place. I am not sure that I accept that as a satisfactory principle for appointing members of a legislature. We do not know who would conduct the by-election and on what basis. We know only that the provision is in Standing Orders—which, presumably, are subject to alteration at the whim of the House. A series of propositions would deliver a fully functioning, law-making body within our constitution comprising either appointees or hereditaries—a rump of people chosen from a list or via an unspecified by-election; we know not what in any detail.

None of those propositions is acceptable. I believe that, once we have swept away the hereditary principle, we should go straight to a proper directly elected upper House. I will not dwell on that point, because this is not the time or the place to do so. However, that is my response to questions that were posed legitimately during the debate. I would have defended the hereditary principle; my party and I did not suggest that it should be changed. However, now that it is to happen, we must respond. My response is that the present arrangement is totally unacceptable. Until someone suggests a proper, legitimate, accountable, directly elected upper House, I will be unable to accept any alternative.

Mr. Nicholls: I always enjoy following my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) in debates as I can usually declare that I agree with everything he said. I cannot go that far tonight—although we start from the same position.

There is an assumption running throughout the debate and underlying this amendment that the hereditary principle cannot be justified in any circumstances. The assumption, to a greater or lesser extent, is that the case has never been made for the hereditary principle. However, I can explain—I can do so in a few words because it underlines my position on the amendment—why the case for the hereditary principle can be, and should have been, made.

We are always told that the hereditary principle cannot be justified because it is not democratic—as though one can examine every ingredient of Parliament and say that each must be democratic before the whole can be. Some people think that sovereignty lies with the House of Commons. The Prime Minister believes that it lies with him. In fact, sovereignty lies with the Queen in Parliament. The monarch is not democratic, and nor is the House of Lords. However, the Queen in Parliament is an institution which works democratically because it makes sure that the people can elect and depose their representatives.

Is the Parliament responsive and democratic? That is the beginning, middle and end of the democratic process. We could have a long debate on another occasion about how we got here, but it is no argument to say that the House of Lords is not democratic and thus should be abolished. However, I accept that we are beyond that point now.

What should we discuss when considering the House of Lords? We should talk about how it functions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will confine his remarks strictly to the amendment.

Mr. Nicholls: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I will define what I think the Weatherill amendment will achieve. We must ask what the reformed House will do after Weatherill. There is no point claiming that Weatherill will enable the reformed Chamber to stand against the House of Commons. It is pointless electing another Chamber simply to oppose the House. I do not want another House to be elected and given democratic legitimacy simply so that it can hold the Prime Minister to account. The correct time to do that is at the next general election, when Conservative Members will go out and

make our case—and many believe that we can defeat him in open country. That is our purpose. Creating an upper House simply to start a constitutional fight with another place is not an attractive prospect.

I like to think that, after Weatherill, the upper House will continue to carry out its current functions. Many in the other place say that the scrutiny role appeals to them, and I am sure that many noble Lords perform that role very carefully. After Weatherill, the second Chamber should not hold up the House of Commons but ensure that the Government of the day—be it Labour or Conservative—act in the full light of day. Although one might not have designed it that way if one had had a blank sheet of paper, the marvellous thing about the House of Lords was that it performed that task. The House of Lords ensured that the electorate could have a second look without holding up the House of Commons. It ensured that the public knew what was afoot so that they could use that information at the next election.

Several hon. Members have asked, in the context of the Weatherill amendment, whether the new reformed House will work. The short answer is: I do not know, but we will find out because it will clearly be some time before the new reformed House is changed. I suppose that views on the matter will differ. A close friend in the upper House believes that, given what has happened to it since 1997, the House of Lords is an institution that can no longer perform the sort of scrutiny role to which I refer. After many years of public service, he decided not to stand for re-election. He will say, "That was a job well done for 600 years" and leave. I understand his view. He is probably wrong, but only time will tell.

If the new House comprises only Members appointed by Prime Ministers—let us face it, the Leader of the House of Lords is there only because she is the daughter of a Prime Minister—how can we be confident that it will perform the tasks that I have set out? Weatherill will achieve that objective. It will keep within the system a body of people who have—I say this without a hint of humour or irony—been judged by their peers; they are there because those with whom they have worked know that they can do the job. They are unwhippable and unbiddable and can provide a degree of independence. That objective must be desirable on pragmatic grounds alone.

Mr. Swayne: Is not the fact that the noble Lords opted for this sordid compromise and failed in the total warfare that we expected from them—which would have cost the Government much of their legislation—proof that they were biddable?

Mr. Nicholls: That is a good point, but it is entirely wrong. It is not based on fact. My hon. Friend and I are Members of Parliament. I am sure that all hon. Members think about the next election. All hon. Members know that the key issue facing the country at the next election is their return to the House, even if no one else makes it. Members of Parliament think in terms of those time scales.

However, the time scale in the upper House is much longer. It is ridiculous to think that the noble Lord Cranborne could be biddable: give him a life peerage and he will hang around for two years in a partially reformed House. I do not know Lord Cranborne; I met him a few times when I served with him in this place and I have talked to him in the Corridor. He does not think in terms of the next election: historically, his family thinks in terms of half a millennium. It is nonsense to think that he could be bought off with a life peerage. I know many hon. Members who could not be bought off with a life peerage—except, of course, my hon. Friend and me. [HON. MEMBERS: "Speak for yourself."] That comment must go on the record.

The idea that Lord Cranborne, Lord Strathclyde, Lord Ferrers and others of that calibre want to stay on in the other place—which many regard as a house of cronies—for the money and the social prestige is completely risible. What is the real motivation for this change, which the Weatherill amendment will improve slightly? It has nothing to do with democracy and everything to do with the Prime Minister. He had a problem. He intended to gain government, abandon his principles and run a right-of-centre fiscal policy. He thought, "How can I keep my Back Benchers happy when, for the most part, they have not secretly abandoned their principles? I'll fling them the hereditary peerage because that does not matter, and I'll give them fox hunting as well."

7.30 pm

If anybody has any doubt that that is the motivation for the reform, they should consider the exchange that took place in Prime Minister's Question Time on 27 October between the Prime Minister and the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), to whom I have written to say that I intended to mention the exchange. When she asked the usual fawning question of the Prime Minister about whether he agreed that he was a marvellous chap because he wanted to do in the hereditary peerage, she lingered over the names of the Earl of Burford. She called him Charles Francis Topham de Vere Beauclerk, and the way in which she pronounced those names absolutely reeked of the class hatred that underlies the Labour party.

If I had used the name of the hon. Lady and had milked it for its ordinary origins, I would have behaved in a disgraceful and ungentlemanly way, but Conservative Members believe that the fact that Labour Members think that it is a legitimate tactic of public debate to mock and sneer at somebody because they hold a name of great nobility says a great deal about them.

The Weatherill amendment is not the most brilliant amendment in the world. It will not achieve a reformed House that is the best that can be devised. It will not enable people to have the social cachet that my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) thinks will be achieved by being a Member of the reformed House, but, for the time being, it will enable peers to continue to do the job that they have done for the past 600 years, which is to make sure that there is a degree of independent scrutiny. Anybody who thinks that, under this Prime Minister, anything better could be achieved is, frankly, not living in the real world.

Mr. Fallon: After having listened to this debate for four hours, I think that its most singular characteristic so far has been the dawning realisation of Labour Members that stage 2 simply will not happen. There has, of course, been one exception—the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) has blind faith that, somehow, he will be re-elected and the first Bill that he will support will be a stage 2 Bill.

[Mr. Fallon]

What Conservative Members have been pointing out ever since we began proceedings on the Bill much earlier this year, and what Labour Members have now begun to realise, is that we shall be stuck with the Bill for perhaps 40, 50 or 60 years. If that were not the case, the Government would have accepted the range of amendments that we offered them in Committee specifically to link the Bill to stage 2. I moved some of those amendments, which offered a range of ways of binding the Government to stage 2. We shall be stuck with this Bill, and we shall be stuck with the Weatherill amendment.

Another characteristic of the debate has been the singular lack of enthusiasm for the Weatherill amendment. I certainly share the reservations of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) about the amendment. It will create something of a hostage House. Those surviving hereditaries, knowing that stage 2 can be produced at any time, will be on their best behaviour. Who knows? They may want to be part of stage 2.

I can well envisage the leader of the Labour hereditary peers trotting round to No. 10 to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) to conclude his own variation on the so-called Cranborne deal. Labour peers will also want to stay on, and the best proof of that lies in the wording of the Weatherill amendment. It contains the arrangements for perpetuation. The 90 will continue.

Other hon. Members have drawn attention to some of the more farcical aspects of that perpetuation. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, we have not heard properly described how by-elections would be organised, or indeed where they would take place. The peers have been expelled from the House of Lords; would they be recalled for the day, given a glass of champagne and invited to vote in the Moses Room? Would they cluster together in White's on a winter morning for a glass of madeira and have the by-elections there? Would the voting be done by post? Special messengers would walk up the gravel drives and through the ducal halls bearing the ballot papers on silver salvers. Who knows how those by-elections would be organised?

I have some sympathy with the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews). I pointed out that they will stand as somewhat unusual friends of the Lord Great Chamberlain and the Earl Marshal, whom they have exempted from their amendment. They are happy for those two hereditary peers to continue.

It is clear that the perpetuation of those peers has the Government's blessing. It is no use the Leader of the House trying, as she has done several times during the debate, to pretend that the amendment has nothing to do with her. It is clear from the drafting of the Weatherill amendment that the Government were involved in its preparation, and I give the right hon. Lady the opportunity to deny that. The inclusion of the peculiar words in brackets in subsection (3) in the amendment has clearly been condoned by the Government. They, too, realise that we will be stuck with the Weatherill peers for a long time to come.

We must decide what to do. That particular deal has been described as grubby, and my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) said that it was a sordid compromise, but deals and compromises often are grubby and sordid. I do not take the particularly purist line adopted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, who said that hereditary peers are unacceptable and nominated peers are unacceptable.

There are degrees of acceptability and I, for one, do not see how a peer whose ancestors have served the public in the legislature simply because one of them was the result of a liaison with the mistress of the sovereign is any less equipped to be a lawmaker than someone who happens to be the Prime Minister's tennis partner and has given the Labour party shedloads of money. I do not draw those fine distinctions. It seems to me that someone whose family have handed down that legislative seat in trust from one generation to another and have retained it through acting responsibly may well claim to have a more legitimate place in the legislature than the Prime Minister's tennis partner.

Mr. Forth: As we share an admiration for that sense of tradition and continuity, does not my hon. Friend believe, as I do, that such people could readily offer themselves for election and be elected overwhelmingly by an electorate that shares our view of them?

Mr. Fallon: That may well happen, who knows? However, that takes us slightly wide of the amendment on which we have to decide tonight.

I, too, without any particular enthusiasm, will be supporting the Weatherill amendment, and I shall do so for four reasons. First, I shall support it because Lord Weatherill is my constituent and, although he does not have a vote, every bit of support counts, and one should support one's constituents. Secondly, I shall vote for the amendment because it gives us an element of continuity, and it is worth reminding ourselves that the other place is the prescriptive part of Parliament. That is why it has survived so long, and the amendment gives us a small measure of continuity and a little link back to the history that has shaped our country.

Thirdly, I shall support the amendment because it gives us a small safeguard against a wholly crony House. It means that the House cannot be filled simply with the Prime Minister's tennis partners and that it will have some Members who have not been appointed by one Prime Minister or another. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), I think that that is an important advantage and it will give us a small element of independence.

Fourthly, it can be argued that the very survival of the Weatherill peers will be a standing reminder that there is unfinished business. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst wants to have a wholly elected House, and other hon. Members support their own particular schemes. The peers' survival will remind us that there is a further job of reform to be done, although I do not expect that it will be done.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: When my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) pointed out that the real failing of the Bill is that there is no plan for

stage 2, we relied on the Leader of the House when she told us that she rested her confidence on the capacity not only of this House, but of the country, to come to some consensus as to what should replace our current arrangements. However, what tonight's debate has revealed—in spades—is that, even though there are only about 40 right hon. and hon. Members in the Chamber, there is no agreement between us, so if there were 659 Members, we would not reach a consensus, unless the measure is driven through against much opposition from one quarter or another. The real failing of the Bill is that it leaves the other place exposed and, as some hon. Members have pointed out, there will be no check on the Executive—at least, we currently have some modicum of a check.

This is the saddest day of the 11½ years during which I have been privileged to serve as a Member of this House. The banishing of most of the hereditary peers and the suspended sentence on the remaining 92 marks the end of a 600-year reign in our history. That is a great sadness for us. I am sorry that most people do not realise what is going on in their name, because the issue does not dominate our tabloid press—or even our broadsheet press.

The measure is shameful. It is being introduced—as with so much under the Labour Government—as modernisation; it is the Prime Minister's substitute for a big idea. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), who has unfortunately left the Chamber, said that he might have discussed the matter when he was a member of the Labour party—it is interesting to see how members of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties move around. He said that people discussed the House of Lords and its abolition.

However, all the evidence shows that people do not support the Government on this matter. Last year, Common Sense for Lords Reform canvassed views and people were asked, "Would you prefer to leave things as they are for the moment, until all the details of the reform have been decided?". No fewer than 68 per cent. supported that proposition, rather than the view that hereditary peers should be abolished before the other details of the reform had been decided. Only 25 per cent. supported that view. It is thus not right to claim that there is popular demand for abolition, although I accept that it formed part of the Labour manifesto.

We do not receive letters from our constituents complaining about the way in which the other place works. It is interesting that no one argues—least of all people all over the country—that the other place is not up to the task of revising the legislation proposed by the Government. Legislation is often given scant scrutiny in this place—whether we or Labour are in government. On the contrary, there is widespread recognition that the other place acts as a reservoir for extensive talent, knowledge and commitment. That means that the other place commands some respect—possibly more than this House.

Notwithstanding the claims of Labour Members, few people argue that their lordships have abused their right to delay legislation. To be sure, they have caused trouble for the Government—as they did for the previous Government. However, they have not abused their right; peers realise that they lack the democratic legitimacy that we enjoy in this place. They know that it is the will of this House—

7.45 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is widening his argument too far. He must come back to the amendment.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for drawing that point to my attention. I was paving the way for my references to the Weatherill amendment. I do not know how the Government can so shamefacedly support the amendment, because, when my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) tabled a similar measure in February, they instructed their troops to vote it down.

As the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) implied, the real reason for the amendment was devoid of principle or of any high motive; it was only to push a squalid deal through this place so as to ensure that the rest of the Government's legislative programme was not disrupted by the other House. Thus, the Government engaged in naked blackmail so that we would deal with the matter today—the very last day of the parliamentary Session—and they could ensure that the rest of their legislation was already in the bag. That is pretty squalid and I think that people outside this place will agree. Having used the measure to bludgeon the other place into submission, the Government now invite us to support it, even though they refused their support when my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest introduced a similar measure earlier this year.

Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I am in two minds as to whether to support the amendment. Part of me said that we should take the Burford approach. Along with many other good Tories throughout the country, I felt that it was good to see an English peer—with the blood of England coursing through his veins—standing up for something in which he believed. On 26 October, I attended the debate in the other place and tried to encourage some of my noble Friends to do the decent thing and to have nothing to do with the Weatherill compromise, but to fight it on principle: either the hereditary principle remained, or they went down fighting.

However, I have reflected on the matter and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), I am inclined to support the amendment—not because it should be part of any kind of deal, or because I am in favour of allowing one or two of our noble Friends to carry on. The balance of advantage lies in our passing the amendment. Although it is an emasculated form of the hereditary principle, it ensures that the principle continues.

I suspect that the real reason that the Government now support the amendment is not simply because they are honouring their side of some bargain, but because they realise that if those 92 peers do not remain, there will be no one to do the work in the other place. Many of those hereditary peers chair Committees and the proceedings of the other House. If they were all to go, it would not be possible for the Government to rely solely on the life peers to man the other place. The Government have taken a pragmatic approach.

I shall vote for the amendment tonight because it will give me great pleasure to see yet another Labour election promise dishonoured. As some of the hon. Friends of the Leader of the House pointed out, they will vote for the Government—if they do—with a heavy heart. They

[Mr. Howarth]

thought that getting rid of the hereditary peers altogether was a Labour election commitment, and they are not happy with this compromise.

I shall also vote for the amendment because at least the 92 peers will remain as a testimony to the whole country of the part that the hereditary principle can play. If those peers were to go, the monarchy would be left exposed as the only hereditary office in the land, apart, of course, from the senior management of News International—another hereditary organisation in which power goes down the family line. The Leader of the House should be pleased because I understand that some of the power goes down through the female line. I am a monarchist—I support the monarchy. Unless the hereditary also applies elsewhere, the monarch will be exposed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks mentioned continuity. That is extremely important. If we were to abandon the hereditary principle altogether, this nation would be the poorer. The continuity and stability of this country are admired. That continuity does not come out of the ether. It comes from our constitutional arrangements. The hereditary principle is one of the essential components of such arrangements, providing roots that go deep into the earth. It is also a good antidote to the word "global", which seems to appear everywhere these days, and helps us when at risk of becoming detached from our roots.

The hereditary principle will be advantageous in ensuring that people who have a sense of duty remain in the other place. Labour Members who are inclined to dismiss the attitude of their lordships do them a disfavour. It is therefore interesting that some have paid tribute to the work of those in the other place.

I should like to quote the words of Lord Wedgewood, whose family seat is not a million miles from the constituency of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). He said:

"we are applauded as a revising Chamber, which delivers in a non-partisan manner like no other second Chamber of Parliament."

That might be disputed, although he goes on to say:

"Why? Because we believe in duty and principle; and we are unpaid."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 October 1999; Vol. 606, c. 287.]

Those words came from the heart. I believe that he spoke for many peers. They are men of principle, and I hope that their sense of duty will continue. One young peer told me, "I do not want to be a full-time politician, but I want to make my contribution in this place from time to time, and I believe that I can do that."

The onus is on those who wish to bring about change to prove that they have something better to put in place of the—perhaps imperfect—mechanism that operates at the moment. I do not believe that they have made such a case. Indeed, on the contrary, they are all over the shop. While any new constitutional arrangements are being set up, we shall face a long period of turmoil, as we are in many others respects in our national life as a result of the Government's policies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) said that he was worried that those who remain will be hostages to their good behaviour. I hope that the noble Lords and ladies who remain in the other place will never allow themselves to be used as hostages, and that they will uphold the sense of independence, impartiality and duty to which I have drawn attention and which I believe is recognised throughout the country. If they do that, who knows, they may sit in the other place for another 600 years.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I echo the final words of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), who is self-cast as the president of the Burford preservation society. He made some extremely good points in his peroration. We owe a great deal to those who have given selfless service over generations—centuries for many families. It is a pity if we allow our zeal, whichever side of the argument we are on, to obscure our sense of gratitude for services that have been rendered. I am delighted to echo the eloquent words of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young).

My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said in a splendid speech that we were all voting for different reasons for fear of something worse. He talked of the Prime Minister exercising patronage in a way that had not been seen since the 18th century. I had not considered the Prime Minister as a latter-day Duke of Newcastle, but it is a thought. We are witnessing a crude exercise of patronage.

We must face the fact, not that we may have a different second Chamber in some years' time, but that a week today, the Queen will open Parliament and we shall have a House of Lords. The issue that we must address is whether the House of Lords that assembles on 17 November 1999 will be better for the presence of the 92 hereditary peers, or the poorer without them.

I believe without equivocation—I was delighted that so many of my hon. Friends, including my right hon. Friends the Members for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) and for Suffolk, Coastal and my hon. Friends the Members for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) believe it, too—that the House of Lords will be better for the 92.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire said, this is a bad Bill. It is a sad day. This is a shabby little Bill, but it will be improved by the amendment, because the House that will come into existence at the beginning of the next Session will be the stronger and better preserved from the undue influence of patronage if the 92 are present.

I am delighted to see the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) taking his place. He made a wonderful speech. I did not agree with all of it, although I concurred entirely with his comments on the danger of the over-mighty Executive. He secured an Adjournment debate on the subject in the small hours of this morning. He knows better than most what an over-mighty Executive can do to this place.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) when he disputes whether the 92 will be able to be their own men and women. They will be the ones who sit in the second Chamber not as a result of patronage. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire pointed out, something like a quarter of the Members of the House of Lords who assemble on 17 November entered it since 1 May 1997. We must also consider the issue in that context.

I know that some hon. Members on both sides of the House cannot bring themselves to vote for the amendment. I respect the views of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), although I am bound to point out that on the previous occasion that such an amendment was debated, he voted for it, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). Everybody is entitled to a change of mind. I hope that, even at this late stage, they will consider the proposal the lesser of two evils and vote for it again.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) has been consistently against the proposal. I admire his consistency, but regret the fact that he does not take the line of those Labour Members whose speeches must have seemed dream contributions to the Whips. I think of the hon. Members for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), for Basildon (Angela Smith) and for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley), who are very happy to stand on their heads and vote for the amendment, having followed the Whips a few months ago and voted against the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing).

I point out to the hon. Member for The Wrekin that before he entertains the House with historical facts again, he ought to get the facts right. The Reform Act of 1867, for which he castigated the Tories for voting against, was an Act of Disraeli's Government.

Of all the speeches in this debate, I must single out that of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan). This Galahad of debate, who has so entertained us so often, gave a clarion call to abstention. I hope that even he—I know his views on the ultimate reform of the House of Lords—would recognise that the interim House, as it is called by some, which will assemble next week, could exist for some considerable time.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House thought that that would be so, including the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, who said that such a Chamber would still be here when he went, and that he would live to be 100 years old—I hope that he lives to be 150. His comments bear the close consideration of us all.

We return to the central point of whether the House that will meet next week will be the stronger, the more independent of patronage and the better able to discharge its functions because of the experience of those who sit in it if the 92 are present than if they are absent. Therefore, although no one is ecstatic about what we are doing, I hope that Members in all parts of the House will recognise a vote for the amendment as a sensible vote to cast tonight.

8 pm

The hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), who is not in his place, should think again. He made another eloquent denunciation of the powers of patronage—although, in a phrase that I shall always remember, he exempted the Prime Minister, whom he described as

"a luminous and beautiful human being".

Doubtless that will lead to a little patronage being exercised in the hon. and learned Gentleman's favour in the not too distant future. What an adornment he would be to the other place.

However, as we near the end of four-and-a-half hours of debate, I have this to say to all my colleagues, especially on the Opposition Benches. Like the Irishman, we would not have started from here.

Mr. Tipping: Or at all.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Or, indeed, at all.

We did not see the need to meddle. We did not see the need to upset. Accepting that the Government had a mandate, we urged them to exercise it with discretion, dignity and proper courage; and to decide what they wanted to replace the second Chamber with, by setting up a royal commission and awaiting its report. The Government came very late to that decision. Even now, they could have waited for the Wakeham commission to report before rushing the Bill through.

We do not like the Bill. We do not think that it is doing a service to the constitution of our nation. Nevertheless, we will vote for the amendment, because it will ensure that the Chamber that meets next week is a better Chamber than it would be without those 92 hereditary peers. On that basis, and that basis alone, I commend the Weatherill amendment to my colleagues. I hope that they will all support it.

Mrs. Beckett: As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, this has been a long debate, following our previous three-hour debate on the principle of the matter, but it is a very important debate and the House should take time to consider the issues.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) all raised the issue of whether the amendment represented a breach of our manifesto commitment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) asked whether changes should be made, even now, in the text of what is now known as the Weatherill amendment, because of fear of delay between stage 1 and stage 2. I repeat what I said earlier in these debates: that is not what the Government have in mind, and it was solely to reassure those who had such fears in the House of Lords that the mechanism to which, in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway took exception—the by-election mechanism—was inserted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central questioned the basis on which the shadow elections for the 92 peers have been held. I simply refer him to subsection (5) of the amendment, which gives

[Mrs. Beckett]

that authority. I understand the elections to have been undertaken on the basis of the Standing Orders of the House of Lords.

Mr. Fisher: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry, I must get on. I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me. I gave way to everyone first time around.

The hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) made a distinctive contribution. I believe that he was saying that we should keep the hereditary principle. That is a legitimate point of view, which others have expressed during the debate.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) spoke to his amendment. I understood that amendment when it was part of a group of amendments. I fear that although I read his amendment and listened to what he said, I did not understand what he was trying to do. What his amendment would do is unclear, but what is clear is that it would add nothing to the Bill's effectiveness. Therefore, I must ask the House to resist it should he press it to a vote.

Mr. Tyrie: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon; I really must get on. *[Interruption.]* With respect, he did not give way to me.

My hon. Friends the Members for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) and for Basildon (Angela Smith), like my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), accepted the compromise, although with some reluctance, as did the hon. Members for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth).

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was pretty rude about everyone else who accepted the amendment, although it turned out in the end that he accepted it, too, because it retained the position of some of those who sat as hereditary peers.

Mrs. Laing: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I am reluctant, but I will give way to the hon. Lady because she did not speak in the debate.

Mrs. Laing: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving way. On the point that she has just made about those who accept or do not accept the amendment, I recall that on 15 February 1999, when I was trying to elicit from the right hon. Lady whether she would accept an amendment in very similar terms that I had proposed that day, she said to me:

"I do not know why the hon. Lady is wasting the Committee's time with this nonsense."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1999; Vol. 325, c. 681-82.]

Will the right hon. Lady now concede that I was not wasting the Committee's time? I was then urging it to vote for the very measure that she is now urging the House to vote for.

Mrs. Beckett: I apologise if I hurt the hon. Lady's feelings, but it is possible that she misunderstood what I was saying. I accused her then of wasting the Committee's time because she kept asking us to explain why we were not going to accept her amendment, even though that had already been explained several times. I have enough respect for the hon. Lady's intelligence to think that she understood the explanation the first time that it was given.

However, the hon. Lady's intervention is perfectly timed, because I was about to mention the right hon. Members for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), both of whom have taken exactly the same stance but from opposite points of view, in that they supported her amendment but appear to be saying that they will reject a similar one tonight. That is obviously because of the way in which the Bill's passage has been conducted, and our recognition that we might be prepared to accept the amendment at this stage but were not at an earlier stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) quite properly asked what the Conservatives had done to advocate and promote reform in the 18 years during which they had the opportunity. The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) suggested that although the Labour party had talked about needing to break the logjam of reform and hence passing the legislation in two stages, previous Labour Governments had not taken action to bring about reform. I believe that I am right in saying that the 1945 Labour Government developed the reduction in the powers of the House of Lords, which was one step towards reform; that the 1964 to 1970 Labour Government famously attempted, and failed, to reform the House of Lords; and that it would have been an act of crass folly for the 1974 to 1979 Labour Government to attempt such a step, given that they hardly had a majority. It has therefore been a consistent theme of Labour Governments to seek reform of the Lords.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) suggested that the Conservative party had in fact progressed towards reform because it had invented the notion of life peers. He was reminded several times in the debate that, having invented the concept of life peers, the Conservative party has consistently used it to reinforce and expand its already substantial majority in the House of Lords.

Throughout the debate, issues have been raised that are familiar to those who have participated in these discussions. There was the usual dismissal of the concession made by the Prime Minister, for the first time in our history, to reduce his power of patronage—as though it were illegitimate for that to be done by a Labour Prime Minister. The notion continued to be trumpeted that, by consistently supporting Conservative Governments and attacking Labour ones, the House of Lords has shown its independence. That notion was amply discredited during the debate, if only by statistics revealing a very different picture.

As he came to the end of his remarks, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, expressing the Conservative party's attitude to the proposals and the amendments, said in one sentence that the way in which the House of Lords had been dealt with was charmless, and in the next that the transitional House would become inferior as a result of the removal of some 659 hereditary peers.

We have had a re-run of many of the arguments that we heard previously, but a consistent feature—and one that is to be regretted—has been the tendency of Opposition Members to denigrate life peers in order to praise the role of hereditaries. That is wrong; we should not denigrate either. Both groups have given service to our country and to our Parliament, and it is right to recognise that. As the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) let fall in an inadvertent remark at the end of our exchanges, for the whole of its history the Conservative party has resisted reform, in particular reform of the House of Lords, although some Conservative Members have reluctantly accepted the amendment.

Today, we are discussing a further dramatic and historic step in our constitutional development. The proposal enshrined in the amendment is not the Government's proposal—it came from the Cross Benches. However, we regard it as offering a prudent and sensible route towards the early removal of all hereditary peers. It ends the hereditary principle as the basis of a seat in the legislature. It means that 659 hereditary peers will leave their House when the Bill is passed. To have incurred potential delay would have meant that 750 hereditary peers would have retained the right to sit and to disrupt the Government's legislative programme for a further year.

We are taking an historic step tonight. After 89 years, I suggest to the House that it is time that it was taken.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) wish to press his amendment to a Division?

Mr. Mackinlay: No, Sir. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) wish to press his amendment to a Division?

Mr. Tyrie: No, Sir.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in said amendment.—*[Mrs. Beckett.]*:—

The House divided: Ayes 438, Noes 22.

Division No. 318] **[8.12 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berrningham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burns, Simon
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Drew, David
Duncan, Alan
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr Kim

Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Malliaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Maxton, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prior, David
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
St Aubyn, Nick
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Squire, Ms Rachel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
Wells, Bowen
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wyatt, Derek
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Graham
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Fisher, Mark
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Hancock, Mike
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Loughton, Tim
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Ruffley, David
Shepherd, Richard
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Viggers, Peter
Whitney, Sir Raymond

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Andrew Tyrie.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 2, after clause 1, to insert the following new clause—*Appointments Commission*—

".—(1) There shall be an Appointments Commission ("the Commission") which shall make proposals to the Prime Minister for recommendations to Her Majesty for the conferment of life peerages in accordance with the Life Peerages Act 1958.

(2) The Commission shall be an advisory non-departmental public body and shall—

(a) be appointed in accordance with the rules of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and may seek his advice about best practice in attracting and assessing potential nominees;

(b) operate an open and transparent nominations system for peers not belonging to, or recommended by, any political party ("the Cross Bench peers");

(c) actively invite nominations by the general public and encourage nominations from professional associations, charities and other public bodies that it judges appropriate;

(d) publish criteria under which it will determine a candidate's suitability for nomination;

(e) reinforce the present function of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee in vetting the suitability of all nominations to life peerages by the political parties; and

(f) scrutinise all candidates for life peerages on the grounds of propriety in relation to political donations, as proposed in the 5th Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

(3) The Commission shall appoint its own Chairman.

(4) It shall, at most every 6 months, and at least every year, make proposals to the Prime Minister for nomination as Cross Bench peers, sufficient at least to fill any vacancies among Cross Bench peers that may occur through death, disqualification or a decision to join a political party represented in the House of Lords.

(5) The Prime Minister may not refuse to submit to Her Majesty the names of those recommended as Cross Bench peers by the Commission, and shall not seek to influence such nominations, save in exceptional circumstances, such as those endangering the security of the realm.

(6) The Commission, in considering nominations as Cross Bench peers, shall not give any additional weight to recommendations from the Prime Minister or the Leaders of other political parties.

(7) Following the passing of this Act the Commission shall make a report annually to Parliament on the recommendations made to Her Majesty by the Prime Minister for the conferment of life peerages, in which it will declare if the following criteria are being observed, namely that—

(a) no one political party commands a majority in the House of Lords;

(b) the Government has broad parity of numbers with the main opposition party;

(c) the proportion of the Cross Bench peers to the total number of peers in the House remains the same as the proportion of the Cross Bench life peers to the total number of life peers in the House on the day before the passing of this Act; and

(d) more than half of the total membership of the House of Lords is composed of peers who in the opinion of the Commission have experience of, and expertise in, fields other than (or in addition to) politics.

(8) The Commission shall consist of eight members of the Privy Council, of whom four shall be appointed by a special Commission of the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and the Lord Chairman of Committees of the House of Lords.

(9) One Commissioner shall be appointed from each of the three largest parties in the House of Commons on the nomination of the Leader of each such party, and one shall be appointed from the Cross Bench peers on the nomination of the Convenor of the Cross Bench Peers."

Mr. Tipping: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 13 and the motion to disagree.

Mr. Tipping: The amendment places the appointments commission on a statutory basis. I remind the House of the Government's commitment to an independent appointments commission set up in accordance with guidelines issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and that the commission will be responsible for identifying Cross-Bench peers. The Prime Minister is the first to relinquish his powers of patronage. *[Interruption.]* It would be interesting to know if any future Tory Prime Minister would do the same; certainly none has done so in the past.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Following that assertion, will the Minister say how many peers the Prime Minister, who is supposedly relinquishing that power of patronage, has created?

Mr. Tipping: It is clear that our proposal is to move towards broad parity with the other parties. We believe that no party should have overall control of the House of Lords. I contrast that with the history of the hon. Gentleman's party.

Mr. Maclennan: The White Paper went beyond broad parity between the parties. It also referred to the principle of proportionality, reflecting the strength of the parties in the House. Can the Minister confirm that that remains the position?

Mr. Tipping: I can confirm that and I shall speak about it at greater length later.

The Government have been consistent in their commitment to reducing their powers over the House of Lords. We do not intend the transitional House to be under the control of the Government. It would have been absurd to suggest that because 500 life peers have been nominated by eight Prime Ministers, mostly Conservatives, over the past 40 years. Our manifesto was explicit on that point: we said that no one party should seek a majority in the House of Lords and that the system of appointment of life peers would be reviewed, and we committed ourselves to maintaining an independent Cross-Bench presence of life peers. We also said that, over time, party appointments should more accurately reflect the votes cast at the preceding general election.

8.30 pm

We have been absolutely clear about the fact that we intend to deliver quickly on our commitments. That is important. Our proposals have three elements. First, there is the principle that will determine the numbers in the transitional House; secondly, there is the introduction of an independent appointments commission to nominate

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Cross-Bench peers; thirdly, there is the undertaking to forward to Her Majesty the Queen, without interference, the recommendation of other party leaders and the commission.

Mr. Fisher: Will my hon. Friend explain how peers who are not Cross Benchers will be appointed?

Mr. Tipping: That will be a matter for the party leaders, which contrasts with the present arrangement. The Prime Minister has made that clear, and, indeed, has already started to forward recommendations for appointment without any interference.

Let me explain the principles of our approach. We have publicly committed ourselves not to seek more than broad parity between the Government and the main opposition party. As our manifesto stated, our objective was that, over time, party appointees as life peers should reflect more accurately the proportion of votes cast at the last general election. We gained 48 per cent. of the votes cast for the three major parties, while the Conservatives gained 34 per cent. When the House of Lords returned after the recess, we composed only 41 per cent. of the membership, while the Conservatives composed 45 per cent.

On the basis of our manifesto, we would have been entitled to an increase of 40 per cent.—roughly 240 more if we start with the Conservatives' 172 life peers. Instead, we have said that we are seeking about the same number that they have. We have gone much further in restraining our ambitions than we needed to, maintaining our manifesto commitment. We are also committed—this answers a point made earlier—to proportionate creations from the other parties.

The White Paper spelled out our commitment to a continuing independent Cross-Bench element. That not only involves a commitment to maintain the relative strength of that element, but distances my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister from the process of selection.

That brings me to the question of the appointments commission, which has two important aspects. The first is the concept that the commission is an indication of the Government's continuing commitment to the idea of independent Members of the House of Lords, which also highlights our commitment to the idea that they should be working Members. The second is the reduction in patronage that will clearly ensue.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I assume that the Minister is serious about the concept of a commission, so why would he not include it in the Bill? If the terms of the amendment are not currently acceptable to the Government, the Minister can easily cure that by tabling his own amendment.

Mr. Tipping: Of course that is true, and that is what this decision is about. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman will wait a little while, I shall explain why we do not intend to include it in the Bill.

As has been explained many times, we intend the appointments commission to be an advisory non-departmental public body. It will include members of the three main parties, and a majority of independent members. The appointment of the independent members will be in accordance with the guidelines for the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Those guidelines include a number of principles: that appointments should be on merit, that all appointments should be subject to independent scrutiny, and that there should be an open and transparent selection process.

Mr. Brady: Is the Minister aware that the same guidelines apply to appointments to health authorities and trusts? In that context, since 1997 some 232 Labour councillors have been appointed to such bodies, as against 20 Conservatives and 30 Liberal Democrats. The guidelines clearly give no guarantee at all.

Mr. Tipping: I will not stray from the terms of the amendment, but I will answer the question—it is quite simple. In previous years, there was a serious imbalance on health bodies and trusts, but the commissioner will look at the matter. There is nothing to hide. We will look forward, and act on the commission's recommendations.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): In regard to representation, the Minister mentioned the three main parties. It is not for me to defend the position of the Scottish National party or that of the parties from Northern Ireland, but will there be no representation for those minority parties?

Mr. Tipping: It is not intended that they will be represented on the appointments commission, but they will be proportionately represented in the other Chamber.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Tipping: I will.

Mr. Maclennan: I thank the Minister. It will save him from having to make the point later.

The Minister will have noted that the new clause introduced by the Weatherill amendment results in some movement towards proportionality. There has, however, been an increase of a mere 2 per cent. in the representation of the Liberal Democrats, as opposed to a 10 per cent. increase in Labour's representation.

Mr. Tipping: The right hon. Gentleman merely demonstrates how much more needs to be done. If he takes that view, it might have been helpful if he had voted for the way forward rather than sitting on his hands and taking no part in the debate on the earlier amendment.

How the parties choose their members is, of course, a matter for them, but I hope that they will follow our example of openness. The appointments commission will be encouraged to seek nominations from a wide field, including nominations from members of the public—the so-called people's peers. *[Interruption.]* Traditionalists groan at that—traditionalists who, perhaps, have not moved on from the 18th century, and have continued to support hereditary peers. How much better it must be for

people to be appointed to the House of Lords because of what they have already achieved, and what they can do for the country.

Mr. Swayne: Is not the proper procedure for choosing "people's peers" a proper election with universal suffrage?

Mr. Tipping: I hope that we shall discuss that point soon. I hope very much that the royal commission will stick to its timetable, and that the House will have an opportunity to express a view on its report during the lifetime of this Parliament. I hope that we can discuss the issues vigorously, and find a solution that will give us a better system than the one we have now.

Mr. Tyrie: When the Labour party made its submission to the Wakeham commission, why on earth was there no mention of any proposal to use election as a means of selecting those who will sit in the upper Chamber?

Mr. Tipping: The Labour party has expressed its view. I was fortunate enough to hear the Conservative party express its view to the Wakeham commission. I will not be drawn on what the Wakeham commission will recommend. I hope that it reports quickly and that we can move on very quickly to the second stage.

We are asking the appointments commission to vet nominations for political peerages, which is currently undertaken by the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee.

Mr. Hogg: The Minister told the House that he would be kind enough to say why, if he is so keen on a commission, he will not put it in the Bill. Will he now answer the question?

Mr. Tipping: The right hon. and learned Gentleman must restrain himself a little. He has been in the House for many years. I told him that I would address the issue and I will.

The third element of our proposal is that the Prime Minister has publicly committed himself to relinquishing control of the nominations and will not interfere with the nominations from other political parties. That process has already started.

We are already going much further than any Prime Minister has ever gone. In debates in both the House of Commons and the other place, there has been an attempt to suggest that, although the present Prime Minister's promises can be accepted, one cannot be sure of the future. I am confident of the honour of any Labour Prime Minister, but is the Conservative party saying that it cannot have the same certainty? By backing the amendment, it must doubt its own integrity.

Another question has been frequently addressed: if our commitment is clear, what is the objection to putting the provision on a statutory basis? That is the basis of the amendment.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Tipping: I want to deal with that question after giving way to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke).

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Minister has said that the Labour party is against election and prefers nomination. If he has doubts about any future Government not following the practice of nomination, the way to protect against that is by putting it on a statutory basis. So far, all his arguments are entirely consistent with the contents of the amendment that he is inviting the House to strike out. Will he now move to the actual point of the debate: why are the Government rejecting proposals which they keep claiming they are in favour of?

Mr. Tipping: I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who is my neighbour, of what I said: I want to deal with that question. Like the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), he should restrain himself for a moment.

Our main contention is that such a move is inappropriate and unnecessary: there is no need to have legislation to establish a body of the type that we have in mind. Advisory non-departmental bodies are normally established without statutory provision. That does not affect either their standing or effectiveness. The Neill committee itself is such a body. Debate on the issue has frequently confused the question of the Prime Minister's role in the matter. The two are separate issues. We can take the Prime Minister out of the process, as far as it is possible to do so, without any statutory provision.

We are also talking about a transitional process. Why make elaborate statutory provisions for something that is only temporary? Why introduce one form of appointments commission by statute, when it is possible that we may receive recommendations for a different approach? The royal commission's terms of reference give scope for that. The clause is elaborate and raises as many questions as it answers.

Legislation, by necessity, needs to cater for all foreseeable circumstances. A non-statutory arrangement can lay out the broad principles, which can be developed and adjusted accordingly, which cannot be done as easily with legislation. As I have said, there are many gaps in the provision. For example, what would be the terms of service for commission members?

Mr. Mackinlay: One of the attractive features of the Lords amendment is that it proposes an annual report to Parliament by the commission. We do not have that under the Nolan, or Neill-style committee—not automatically. We will want some guarantee that, in the appointment of legislators—the appointment of Members of Parliament—an opportunity is built into the system whereby we can scrutinise the appointments commission and ensure that it is doing its work and has not been manipulated in any way. It must be the subject of scrutiny. That is our role here. The amendment contains that provision.

Mr. Tipping: It must be the case that the appointments commission, whether it is a statutory or a non-departmental public body, is accountable. It will produce reports. I am confident that hon. Members on both sides of the House will review its operations and challenge it if it is not effective.

8.45 pm

Our proposals in the White Paper were not developed to be statutory. They cannot simply be lifted verbatim and put into statute, as Lords amendment No. 2 attempts to do. The new clause itself is wrong and deficient. It is also

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internally inconsistent. To take the most obvious example, how can a requirement that members of the appointments commission be recruited under the Nolan principles seriously be reconciled with the requirement that they are all to be Privy Councillors? The reference to the Privy Council is also a statutory innovation: no other position in public life has a statutory right or requirement to Privy Council membership.

We believe that it is neither necessary nor worth while to pursue that particular amendment. No one has tabled amendments that address the new clause's internal problems. The current version of the new clause is the only one that is available. The House should not legislate to include in an Act of Parliament a provision that we know is as internally flawed as the current one.

Mr. Tyrie: If the hon. Gentleman does not like Privy Councillors, he is at liberty to amend the new clause to specify a different group—perhaps anyone but Privy Councillors. I am sure that Opposition Members would accept that.

Mr. Tipping: I am entitled to recommend and advocate the approach that I believe in, which is an appointments commission established as I have described.

Were it not for Lords amendment No. 2, substantial progress would already have been made in establishing the appointments commission. Treasury permission to begin implementation of the commission has already been secured. Indeed, work had already begun in establishing it. However, Lords amendment No. 2 has brought a premature halt to that progress. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] It would have been inappropriate for progress in establishing the appointments commission to be made while we were considering an amendment from the other place that proposed dealing with the matter in statute.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: With the greatest respect, so far no reason that the Minister has given to reject the amendment has made the slightest sense. If the Treasury has authorised establishing an independent commission, the fact that the other place—entirely in line with the Government's proposals—has proposed a statutory basis for the commission should not stop preparations. Which feature of the proposals no longer attracts the Government? The argument about Privy Councillors was incomprehensible. The Minister has not given one reason why all the members should not be Privy Councillors. It is also entirely irrelevant that the Bill has made no mention of Privy Councillors. What is the Minister's objection to any part of the proposal, and why should any part of the proposal stop the Treasury financing preparations for the commission?

Mr. Tipping: The right hon. and learned Gentleman asks why we have not made greater progress. I take the view that it would be an insult to Parliament—to the Lords and to the Commons—to proceed with our own plans while we were considering an amendment proposing establishing the commission in statute.

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Tipping: No, I shall not give way again—I have already given way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman plenty of times. He also asked why the appointments commission cannot be statutory. As I said, our own proposals will work.

Mr. Forth: Trust me.

Mr. Tipping: What is important is what works, and our proposals will work; they are well tried and well tested. The appointments commission will operate initially during the transitional House, and it may well be that, in the light of the royal commission's report, we shall want to adjust the process. However, that will depend on the Wakeham report.

As I said, I should have hoped that we could make greater progress on establishing the appointments commission. Unfortunately, a stalemate has developed. Our desire quickly to implement an appointments commission has been unnecessarily delayed by an insistence on its statutory basis. Today, however, we shall have the opportunity to break the logjam. If the amendment is rejected, the way will be clear to set in motion again the process of establishing the commission.

Whatever the critics may say, we want and are determined to make quick progress. Our proposals will work; our route is well established; our desire is absolutely clear. We will reduce the powers of patronage in the interim House. With that, I ask the House to reject the Lords amendment.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I have heard some speeches in my time, but never have I heard such a threadbare speech from someone on the Government Front Bench. It was an extraordinary speech. The Minister, who is an amiable cove, was blasted out of the water by his constituency neighbour, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). It was an Alice in Wonderland speech—if I say it three times, it is true.

If the Prime Minister genuinely wants these appointments to be conducted by an independent appointments commission, what is the logical objection to having a statutory commission? The Minister has not advanced one plausible reason to vote against the amendment. Is he saying that because the House of Lords passed the amendment, the Government were suddenly struck by legislative paralysis, totally incapable of tabling amendments of their own and of making it a little more workable if they thought it not workable? Are they totally incapable of making any progress with their own appointments commission, so that the Minister could stand at the Dispatch Box tonight and tell us a little more about that? The whole thing is absolutely incredible.

The Lords amendment seems very modest. Our colleagues in another place have taken the Government at face value. They have said that they accept and welcome the fact that the Government are going to have an independent commission and that that is a good idea. They have therefore said, "Let us put it on the face of the Bill,

set it up on a statutory basis and, what is more, go to the Government's White Paper to select the criteria for the commission." I cannot for the life of me understand what is objectionable or wrong about that.

The faces of some of the Minister's hon. Friends were studies indeed. Their looks of amazed incredulity as he stumbled through the reasons for not doing so were wonderful to behold. No one in this House who has studied the question could attach any credibility to what the hon. Gentleman said.

Even tonight, amendments were tabled to Lords amendment No. 1. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) withdrew them, but they had tabled them and they were debated. If the Government had chosen to table some amendments, they would most certainly have been selected and debated. If they had done so, the Minister could have told us why Privy Councillors were not appropriate, or why the new clause did not fit and where we could improve it. But no—the hon. Gentleman merely turned the amendment down, without giving any sensible reason.

The hon. Member for Thurrock made a good point about the annual report to Parliament. The Minister replied that there are other annual reports to Parliament. What he seemed not fully to understand is that this is a unique—for once, I use that word totally correctly—situation. We are talking about the appointment of legislators, not of members of health trusts or anything else, important as they are and valuable as the work that they do is. We know from the previous debate that there is considerable anxiety among Labour Members—including the hon. Member for Thurrock, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews)—about the power of patronage and the influence that the Prime Minister will have.

The Minister's comments about the Prime Minister's appointments commission did not address the central issue that it will be appointed by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Hogg: What is more, did not the Minister speak about adjusting the situation, should developments require it? Who would adjust the remit of an independent appointments commission?

Sir Patrick Cormack: There are only one or two people who could do that—the Prime Minister or the all-knowing, all-seeing, fingers-in-everything Mr. Campbell—and by Jove, they would if they did not like the situation. The Prime Minister has appointed one quarter of the strength of the House of Lords as it will be next week. He has created 171 peers—some of them a trifle odd—in the past two and a half years. That is more than the previous Prime Minister appointed in seven years. Those are facts, not just things that I am dredging up from the back of my mind. Against that background, is it any wonder that there is a credibility gap in the House—on both sides—and outside?

Let us say that we trust the Prime Minister. I believe the Minister to be eminently honourable and trustworthy. I say that entirely without sarcasm. However, that is not sufficient. Who is to say that there will not be others who will manipulate? We have seen certain examples over the past two and a half years of the skills of manipulation in high places. If we had a statutory body set up as the amendment suggests—the Minister knows that it was passed by a substantial majority in the other place—those fears would not exist. People would believe that the body was transparent. It would be set up for a specific purpose.

It is a very weak argument to say that the interim House of Lords will not last for long. As we said in the previous debate, we do not know how long it will last. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield thinks that it will last for at least 25 years. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) thinks that it will last for a fair time. There are others who think that it will not last for so long. There are some who do not want it to last for very long. However, it is clear that for the immediately foreseeable future—I choose my words with great care—that will be the second Chamber. It is crucial that it should have the respect of the nation. For all that has been said about the House of Lords that we are getting rid of and all the blemishes that some may think it has, it has certainly enjoyed the respect of the nation.

Dr. Godman: No it has not.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but let me concede for a moment that he may be right. If he is, it is all the more important that the new House should have such respect, untarnished by suspicion.

It is crucial that we accept the amendment. It would not damage the Government's legislative plans or solutions. It would not alter the Bill or the composition of the other place from 17 November. It would merely ensure that future appointments were made by a statutory body that could not be manipulated, tinkered with, messed around, suspended or adjusted for political reasons by anybody who felt that the situation might be a little uncomfortable at the moment.

I am sorry that not more hon. Members are present this evening. I urge every hon. Member who wants to have respect for the integrity of both Houses of Parliament to support the amendment putting the commission into the Bill, so that, when the Queen gives the Bill her Royal Assent, we can all feel that, although we have an imperfect body—we would all agree with that; some of my right hon. and hon. Friends want radical change, others more minor change—we at least have confidence in the system that will exist for the immediate future.

9 pm

Mr. Leigh: Is it not rather irrelevant whether the measure is in statute? Is not the appointments commission a fig leaf for what we know, from Lady Richard's diaries, to be the attitude of the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary, which is that they do not want an elected second Chamber? What we really want is an elected second Chamber.

Sir Patrick Cormack: My hon. Friend speaks for himself, and it is a view which is shared by many. We do not yet know what the Wakeham commission will recommend. The official position of the Conservative party is to wait to see what the Wakeham commission has to say, after which we shall debate it and come to a considered conclusion. It may or may not be that advocated by my hon. Friend.

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

For the foreseeable future, however, we know what we have, and this is more than a fig leaf. The appointments commission should be a statutory body in which people can have confidence so that they at least feel that the second Chamber cannot be packed in a manipulative way by unscrupulous politicians. I urge the House to support the amendment.

Mr. Fisher: I failed to follow the argument of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). He makes a passionate plea for the commission's independence, but, according to the amendment, it would have such limited powers as to be meaningless. It could nominate only Cross-Benchers. What about nominations from other parties? If the whole point of the commission is to ensure confidence and independence, it should scrutinise and nominate all the appointments from all the political parties.

If the hon. Gentleman were to persuade us to carry the amendment, cronyism would simply spread from all the political parties. It is not clear what the amendment means by political parties. Does that include the Referendum party or the Green party, or some new party that can nominate itself? The amendment is ill thought out and ill drafted and will not achieve the ends that the hon. Gentleman, I think with all sincerity, believes that it will. It will not provide independence and confidence in the new process.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman does no more than say that the amendment does not go far enough, and I agree. If it went as far as the hon. Gentleman suggests, doubtless he would support it.

Mr. Fisher: Absolutely. As hon. Members know, I am strongly in favour of a totally elected Chamber. But if for the foreseeable future we are to have a Chamber for which all new appointments are nominated, not elected, it is essential, to avoid accusations of cronyism by any party or by anybody, that those nominations should be made and scrutinised by an arm's-length, independent body that is not in the grip of any political party or of the political process. Surely nothing else will do. We have to have an independent commission with complete powers over all nominations.

The political parties, like everyone else, can make recommendations and nominations to the commission, but the commission should have the power of appointment. The Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition or the leader of the Liberal party should not have those powers; otherwise, we should have a rigged and manipulated second Chamber.

On one level, I should be glad to see an appointed second Chamber discredited in that way, but the pain and suffering for the democratic process in the interim are not worth the winning of the point that an appointed second Chamber is completely unsatisfactory. If we are to have an appointed second Chamber, let it be the best that we can have. We must have an independent commission.

I fear that my hon. Friend the Minister is rejecting the proposal for other reasons. He does not want a totally independent and arm's-length commission. However, it is unclear what he is asking us to reject the amendment in favour of. The Government have not published guidelines, and we do not know what sort of commission they are intending. Could the Minister say when the Government intend to publish the proposals for the commission? What powers will it have? On what grounds will it be able to reject appointments? What will happen to the non-Cross-Bench element? The Government's position seems as unclear as the amendment is unsatisfactory.

The only way to resolve the problem is to reject the amendment but for the Government to give an undertaking that they will publish guidelines as soon as possible and will make no nominations or appointments to the second Chamber until those guidelines have been published, debated and approved by this Chamber. Otherwise, the second Chamber will be open to the accusation of cronyism.

That may cause problems with the new year's honours, as I am sure the Government want to get on with appointing new Members to the second Chamber. However, it would be wholly unsatisfactory to have another round of nominated people—by the Opposition and the Government—in the second Chamber. We need the commission to be up and approved by this Chamber before there are any more nominations to the second Chamber.

Mr. Maclennan: I very much agree with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). The Government's case for not accepting the amendment would have been much strengthened had they been more firm and active in explaining their intentions. The principle has been enunciated before, but the detail has not.

I found uncompelling the argument that we had to wait on the conclusion of the House before setting out the machinery to give effect to the Government's principles. That has not been operated by Governments before. Preparatory steps of an Executive kind are often taken by Governments to enable them to take action as soon as the House has reached a view. It does not pre-empt the decision, but enables one to be made in a timely way. On this occasion, we have not had that action from the Government.

I hope that, as a result of the debate, we shall at least prise from the Government an indication of how and when they intend to deal with the appointment of Cross-Bench peers. As soon as the legislation is enacted, this problem will be a live one.

I disagree entirely with the view that it is either appropriate or necessary for the arrangements to be based upon statute. If it does not need to be the result of statute to operate effectively, I see no reason why that is required. The precedent is far from clear. We have an arm's-length scrutiny committee which is not a statutory body, and we have other means of making appointments. We need not clutter the statute book, or go into detailed consideration of precisely how this measure is to operate, and then set those deliberations in stone prior to the recommendations of the Wakeham commission.

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman says that he is not persuaded that the commission should be put on a statutory basis. Surely the answer is that appointments and the use of patronage are matters of great sensitivity which Governments can misuse. It is extremely important to

make it more difficult for Governments to misuse such powers than it would be if the commission were not on a statutory basis.

Mr. Maclennan: I am not clear how making the process statutory would necessarily make such misuse more difficult. It is important not to get this out of proportion. We are talking about the Cross Benchers, who form only 20 to 25 per cent. of peers. The amendment does not cover the bulk of appointed peers who will be nominated following the enactment of this legislation.

There is some implication that a statutory arrangement confers special legitimacy on those who are appointed under it—a legitimacy that they might not have had under another system. I do not regard that as a desirable outcome. The appointed Cross Benchers would be no more legitimate than those appointed by other means, and a great deal less legitimate than elected members of the upper House would be.

My final point reinforces what the Minister fairly said about this being intended not as a lasting arrangement but as an interim scheme pending stage 2 of Lords reform. I reiterate that that should not be too long delayed. In the meantime, we can put flexible machinery in place that could be adjusted and adapted according to recommendations from any source. That is a sensible way to proceed and will carry considerable clout and credibility if Ministers say more precisely, as soon as may be, how and when they wish to do it.

Mr. Mackinlay: Under any sensible legislative process, we would have had this debate at the House of Commons Committee stage of the Bill. It is worth noting again that the Bill that was presented to us was, to use the term offered by the Clerk, tightly drawn. It did not allow amendments in the House of Commons, so we could not probe or suggest improvements. That was demonstrably a large flaw in our process. The Lords were able to table amendments such as the one that we are debating, flawed as it might be. The measure has not had the scrutiny that it would normally have had in the Committees of the two Houses. In a sense, we have been denied our Committee stage. I make that point in case any colleagues not in the Chamber are irked that some of us are detaining the House. It is an important issue, and we have a duty to scrutinise and examine it.

I have grave misgivings about the legitimacy of so-called Cross Benchers in an appointed House. Whom do independents or Cross Benchers represent but themselves? In this place, we are distinguished because we have the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), who has a demonstrable mandate. He can justifiably be proud of that; he has faced an electorate. The Cross Benchers in the House of Lords, however, do not attract me at all. However, I find common ground with my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), and disagree with the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), in that the issue of selecting Cross Benchers is indivisible from the appointment of peers from political parties.

My great concern about what has been proposed is no personal criticism of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition or their successors, but a matter of human nature. People do not appoint to bodies persons who can be an irritant—or at least, it takes a very special person to do it.

One of the interesting things about an electoral process, albeit a flawed one, is that some of us get under the net and manage to get elected. One of the strengths of the House of Commons is that it contains mavericks, loose cannons, the bloody-minded, the irascible, the eccentric and, sometimes, the bad. Taken together, that cocktail of personalities adds up to a strength.

9.15 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: Not for a minute, because I am on a roll.

It is in the nature of an appointed House that it will contain those who match the image and likeness of the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition. It is naive to suggest otherwise. I therefore reluctantly, and with regret, conclude that, for however many years we have the interim appointed House, we need the Cross Benchers to provide that which would be denied by appointments made through the patronage of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

I have said publicly elsewhere that it is still within the powers of the current Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition to ensure a degree of transparency in the party nomination processes. No doubt the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats could have some form of regional procedure, and I cannot see why that process would not throw up people for consideration by the party leader. For that matter, we in the Labour party should make similar provision.

The case for that can be found in my surprise at the elevation to the other place of certain people nominated by the party leaders. I should like to conduct an audit of some of those people to discover, for example, how long they had been members of the Labour party; of which Labour party they were members; for which Labour party they had delivered leaflets; and for which Labour candidates they had been prepared to sit outside in the rain taking numbers at the polling station. Although some of them would qualify, others would find it a great strain to demonstrate that they had stood by Labour in bad times as well as good.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that some of us suspect that the audit conducted is of a different nature?

Mr. Mackinlay: I am lost for words, but I recall promising to give way to my hon. and distinguished Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham).

Mr. Bermingham: Perhaps my hon. Friend would care to consider a thought that crossed my mind as he gave his accurate appraisal. Will he define what qualities a person would need to have to be appointed to be a Cross Bencher, if he was not someone who had served a party?

Mr. Mackinlay: My point is that nominations by party leaders will result in clones—I do not use that word in an extravagant sense, but such a result is in the nature

[Mr. Mackinlay]

of things. A good parliamentary debate requires people who are able to tell the Government that they have, on occasion, got it wrong. One of the great flaws of Margaret Thatcher's period was that there was no one left at the Cabinet table to tell her that the poll tax was a daft idea. In a parliamentary Chamber, such people are needed, but the selection procedure for party nominees as drafted will not provide them. I reluctantly conclude that the Cross Benchers are needed.

The reason for my feelings on the subject is that I recall discussing with a member of the current Government the democratic deficit in respect of Gibraltar. The Minister said I probably had a point, but then realised what I was up to, looked me in the eye and said, "You don't mean that bloody fool Bossano, do you?" Joe Bossano is no fool, but he is certainly an irritant, and I do not believe that party caucuses or groups will result in the appointment of irritants.

The Lords amendments are flawed: for example, I find it repugnant that they require that the members of the commission should be Privy Councillors. Although I do not mind people holding the title—I do not lie awake at night worrying about it—I want the Privy Council to be abolished. Any further institutionalisation of that club would be wrong. Even now in the House of Commons, we sometimes see a two-tier system comprising those who are Privy Councillors and those who are not, and that irritates me.

I think that the Lords amendment is flawed, but not fatally flawed. In addition, it states that the appointments commission will not consider for nomination to the Cross Benches peers who are members of a political party. That is too prescriptive, for the reasons that I have explained earlier. It is possible to be act independently while remaining loyal to a political party.

I listened carefully to the Minister's explanation of the Government's proposals. I was attracted by his idea that the body should exercise the function of the political honours scrutiny committee. That would cheer me a bit if I thought that there would be an annual report to Parliament. I look the Minister in the eye: if nothing else happens tonight, it is surely not beyond his mandate—granted by those who are not in the Chamber but who will want an account of the proceedings—to give an undertaking on behalf of the Government that the commission will give an annual report to Parliament. There should at least be a reasonable chance of allocating some parliamentary time to debate that report on the Floor of the House.

We have an obligation to scrutinise the appointments commission. The gravity of this matter is sometimes lost: we are talking about the appointment of Members of Parliament, albeit in another Chamber. That duty cannot be taken lightly, and we must build in guarantees that we will oversee the commission's work.

I have a feeling that this independent body will comprise the great and the good, and a few of the glitterati. That troubles me greatly. I rarely use the term "class"—I certainly would not have used it during the previous debate. However, I believe that Parliament—even this Chamber—has an increasingly narrow social base. One of my party's strengths was that it threw up people who used to be called blue collar workers. Such people had to learn the tools of their trade and had some experience of life outside; that enriched the Chamber.

If we are candid, we will agree that today's Members of Parliament are pretty grey. We are of a similar ilk. In a democracy, we should try to ensure that our legislative assemblies are a microcosm of the nation. Therefore, we should work hard to guarantee a mix of Members—and that is not happening at present. Although there may be divisions between left and right—the divide is pretty narrow nowadays—hon. Members come from similar social groupings. We must reverse that trend.

I do not see how the appointments commission will do that. The issue is extremely important in an unelected House. In our democracy, the party system still sometimes provides some variance from the increasingly grey membership. This is a challenge for those who serve on the appointments commission. We must not forget about the people from our industrial areas: the working class people who often do not have the opportunity to be represented in politics. *[Interruption.]* This is an important issue, despite the levity on the opposite Benches. This House of Commons was more representative a few years ago than it is today. That is due partly to social changes, better education opportunities and the changing nature of political parties. I deeply regret that there are few grandees left in the Tory party—I can see only one. Where have all the nice people gone? And where are the people who represent the working class traditions of the Labour party? They are greatly diminished in number.

We have to be mindful of that point, particularly in relation to an unappointed House, and I hope that the Minister will take that on board when he replies. I hope also that he will not forget about the annual report to Parliament.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): As I follow the speech of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), with whom I largely agreed on some points, I shall begin by agreeing with him about the extremely unsatisfactory way in which this matter has been debated. This serious subject has had to be considered at this late stage, in a debate on a Lords amendment, because the House has not previously been able to address it.

The reform of the upper House is in danger of producing a so-called transitional House that has even more elements of Gilbert and Sullivan that the one that it will replace. This has been a complete dog's breakfast from beginning to end. The Bill was introduced by a Government who want simply to abolish hereditaries and replace the upper House with a wholly nominated House within prime ministerial patronage. To move on from that, they are now, without having clear views about their objectives, putting everything in the hands of a commission that will make recommendations. We are discussing a key feature of an interim reform that may last for many years.

I echo the hon. Member for Thurrock's point that we are talking about how large numbers of people will become Members of Parliament. We are discussing the appointment of legislators, not health authority chairmen or magistrates, although they are important. We are talking about people who will play a role in the government of this country.

It is only by accident that we are able even to debate how the upper House should be nominated, because the Bill was so tightly drawn that the matter could not be debated in the House when the Bill was first considered. Because the upper House passed this amendment—which, for the lack of anything else, I approve of—we are now able to discuss the matter in an interesting debate, but, it has to be said, in a perfunctory manner, at the last moment, at the end of a Session. Obviously, everyone assumes that the Government will trundle through, giving themselves a free hand in how to proceed, and that they will come back to us later and tell us what arrangements they will put in place for the nomination of Cross-Bench peers.

I agree with most of those who have spoken so far. I agree with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) that the amendment is, in any event, second best. I am in favour of a wholly elected upper House, but we face, in the interim, an upper House that will now be dominated by patronage, which I regard as second best.

Their lordships have given us the opportunity to say that at least a small part of that patronage should be free of prime ministerial control and partisan or party political control. Unlike the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, I think that we should grasp at that, because it would be nice to have some Members of the upper House going at least some way towards independence, which would give them a little more legitimacy as legislators than those who simply come through the party machines that will nominate all the other peers. I therefore support the amendment.

What astonishes me is why, given that the House has got round to discussing this matter, the Government want to remove the proposals for ensuring the independence of the nomination of Cross-Bench peers. I understood that the proposals were made by the Government. Their lordships have taken the Government at face value and done them the courtesy of including the Government's proposals in the Bill. However, the unfortunate Minister is, with the greatest respect, left doing his manful best to persuade us, without giving us any serious reason whatever, to remove from the Bill, at the Government's behest, their only proposals—and what I thought, until this evening, was their preferred route for producing Cross-Bench peers.

It would be ridiculous to withdraw the proposals, which, faute de mieux, are the best that we have. The House should not lightly dismiss the proposals and wait to see what the Government come up with next. We should not say, "Let's leave it to the Government. We do not want the House to have any legislative say in the process."

I have already dealt with my response to the speech by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), who, I think, agreed with some of my criticisms. The idea that it does not matter whether the commission is statutory, because one can compare it with the Nolan committee or the scrutiny of the honours list, falls, because we are talking about how Members of Parliament should be nominated.

The most tedious details of the laws determining how Members of this House are elected are rightly subjected to interminable debate and considerable controversy whenever any changes are made. It is no good for us simply to accept the measure. There should be a legislative proposal in the Bill for the nomination and appointment of Cross-Bench peers, but this measure is the best one we have.

9.30 pm

I turn to the feebleness of the Minister's arguments. I respect the Minister, who represents a constituency that borders my own, and I know him to be an able man, but the poor man was equipped with no arguments whatever in favour of the proposition that he was instructed to tell us we should support. As I recall, he deployed only two arguments; I shall deal with them briefly.

The first argument was that we should trust the Prime Minister. I do. Not even the Prime Minister could easily go back on his word and say that he had changed his mind and that he would, after all, nominate all the Members of the other place. However, I should like to hear a little more detail before I am asked to trust a Prime Minister. The Minister shot himself in the foot when he made it clear that he would not trust a Conservative Prime Minister. He made a few partisan remarks about what might happen if our present, noble and trustworthy Prime Minister were to be replaced by someone from the Conservative side of the House—there might be changes.

The answer is clear: if one has suspicions of any kind, one puts the preference of the House into legislative form. In that case, any subsequent Prime Minister—even the present Prime Minister—must at least introduce substantial legislation to change the proposals. Why should it be a matter of trust in the Prime Minister? In this case, we could include provisions in the Bill that reflect what the Prime Minister appears to have endorsed in the past. As far as I am aware, these are the only proposals that the Government have ever produced on this subject—they have not been changed since they were introduced.

However, I suspect that there may have been changes. The Minister's second argument was that the noble Lords made a terrible error when they included the Government's proposals in the Bill, because that meant that the Government had to stop working on their proposals. Apparently, once the proposals were put in statutory form, the work that was already under way to prepare the arrangements for nominations for Cross-Bench peers had to stop. The Minister produced the extraordinary argument that it would have somehow been an affront to the other place or to Parliament to carry on spending money on preparing the arrangements.

The Minister said that the work was halted and that that had caused delay. Plans were being made to have everything in place by 1 January 2001, but the upper House passed the amendment and the work had to stop. I do not understand that argument, especially if the work in hand was in line with the Government's only announced proposals, which are the ones before us. If the Government were preparing proposals for a commission to nominate Cross-Bench peers, and the other place passed an amendment to give them a statutory form, why did the work have to stop?

It sounds as though the work that was in hand did not match these proposals. The Government had work in hand—with Treasury approval—for some other system of nominating Cross-Bench peers, but they stopped it because the upper House put their proposals into statutory form. If work was in hand, why cannot the Minister tell

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

us on what it was based? How did it differ from the measure before us? If he tells us that it was not different, why did it have to be stopped just because the other place passed an amendment?

The whole argument is a complete non sequitur. The Minister seems to be arguing against what he was really aiming at. He wants the Government to be given a completely free hand to devise whatever system they want. They do not want to be tied to their first proposals, or to the current proposals. Even when the Minister was pressed to tell us which feature he found objectionable or otiose, and what he might have to remove, he could not think of anything. The best he could come up with—he received a little support from the hon. Member for Thurrock—was that currently the measure requires that every member of the commission should be a Privy Councillor. That is apparently a shocking suggestion—although not because the Minister is against the members being Privy Councillors; he did not say that they would not all be Privy Councillors. He produced an amazing precedent, which someone in the Cabinet Office must have dug out for him, to the effect that no one has ever mentioned Privy Councillors in a Bill. This is a moving moment; for the first time, we are mentioning Privy Councillors in a Bill. However, for the life of me, I cannot see why that is fatal to the whole proposal.

If the Government do not like the present Privy Councillors—I declare an interest; I am a Privy Councillor—they could easily appoint others when they put them on the commission. So it is no great shakes whether Privy Councillors are mentioned or not. That was the one and only feature of the Lords amendment which the Minister could think he might not want to follow in practice.

The whole matter is an absurdity. With great respect to the Minister, his speech was an absurdity. It compounded the ludicrous way in which the House has been asked to handle a very important feature of constitutional reform. We are, for heaven's sake, talking about the second Chamber of the British Parliament, yet the matter has been handled in a Mickey Mouse fashion from beginning to end. Even at this late stage, we are being left to imagine what the Government will propose—later than they intended—for nomination of Cross-Bench peers. None of us is allowed to know today what the Government intend if they are indeed to depart from the proposals in the amendment.

The House is not being treated with any respect. An important issue is being brushed aside. Somebody should have found some arguments for the Minister to use. Given that supporting the other House in the amendment is the only way in which we may at least reduce the potential for some patronage and guarantee some independence in the appointment of temporary peers who will form the second House, we should support it and not allow the Government to wheel through the House, using their majority, a proposition for which they have no sensible argument.

Dr. Godman: I should like to ask the Minister a couple of questions. Before I do so, I offer my apologies to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), for interrupting his comments on the respect that people have for the other place. I should point out that all recent opinion polls in Scotland on the subject of the governance of the United Kingdom have shown that there is diminishing respect for the other place as it is currently structured. Incidentally, a more recent opinion poll suggested that 80 per cent. of Scots believed that Scotland would be independent within 20 years—but that is another thing.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) that, as a former shipwright to trade, I find it a great honour and privilege to be in this place.

Mr. Mackinlay: Alas, my hon. Friend is a dying breed.

Dr. Godman: No, Lord Dixon is another former shipwright. I hope that he stays on despite the changes.

I have some concerns about the Government's proposals. I support totally the perspective of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) and the views of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). If we are to have a bicameral system, the second House must be elected and must represent the multinational state in which we live. I shall come to that point in a minute.

Unless the proposals are amended, hundreds of thousands of voters will be deprived of having their concerns expressed during the commission's deliberations. Am I right in thinking that Scottish judges are given the privilege of becoming Cross Benchers, and that that will not change?

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock that the commission should not be composed of Privy Councillors. We should move on from electing the great and the good to deliberate on such profound matters. The role given to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to deal with areas of conflict between the Scottish Parliament and the United Kingdom Parliament was a major mistake under the Scotland Act 1998. That, however, is another story.

Subsection (9) of the amendment says:

"One Commissioner shall be appointed from each of the three largest parties in the House of Commons".

That means that the hundreds of thousands of electors in Northern Ireland are excluded from this scheme of things. As a frequent visitor to Northern Ireland—as chairman of the parliamentary Labour party's Northern Ireland committee—I find that unacceptable. We have a number of MPs representing the 1.5 million people in Northern Ireland; we have Ulster Unionist Members, Democratic Unionist Members and my hon. Friends representing the SDLP.

I do not hold any brief for the Scottish National party, but say what you will about that party, a substantial minority of people in Scotland actively support it. I hold no brief for SNP Members; they absent themselves from the Chamber when we are discussing all sorts of issues that are of paramount importance to the people of Scotland, such as defence or international relations. However, the views of very many Scottish voters will not be represented as they should be.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is not wholly right. If he looks at the proposed new clause, which may of course be defective, he will see that the commission must consist

of eight members, of whom only three are specified. That leaves considerable discretion as to who makes up the five.

Dr. Godman: I am exceedingly grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I would hope that these minority parties might be represented among the other five representatives. Somehow I doubt that, given the way the new clause is drafted, but I make a plea to the Minister that especially at a moment like this, when things are not going too well with the negotiations in Northern Ireland on the Good Friday agreement, we do not want to send a message to people in Northern Ireland that we are not really concerned about their representation on a body as important as this.

I envisage that we shall go through a transitional phase before the House debates—I hope thoroughly, and in a tough-minded way—the recommendations of the Wakeham commission. From there, we should move on to legislation. I hope that some of us will be there to argue the case for an elected second Chamber, but, in the meantime, the Minister and his ministerial colleagues really must reconsider the composition of the appointments commission, because it is not good enough to be seen to push to one side the people of Northern Ireland and elsewhere in this multinational state of ours.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman). He and I are members of the British-Irish parliamentary group. We frequently visit the Province together. We therefore experience mutual exposure to revolutionary fervour. I was prevented from speaking on the Weatherill amendment by the meeting of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, and I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said in that regard.

I declare an interest, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) did, as a member of the Privy Council. I should be entirely prepared to disclaim the involvement of the Privy Council in the amendment, although I am more sensitive about the future membership of the Privy Council than is my right hon. and learned Friend.

The question at the heart of this serial legislation, as it will become because of the limited nature of the Bill, is what the future powers of the House of Lords should be. I do not share the confidence, expressed by the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) in the previous debate, that the Government will necessarily have the stamina and the courage to proceed to a second Bill.

9.45 pm

It will be to the shame of the Labour party if its self-stressed modernising ambitions are limited to the relatively simple task of abolishing the hereditary principle when there is a Labour majority of almost 200 in this House, and if the Government do not proceed to the more serious and ultimately more worthwhile and demanding task of redefining the powers of the second Chamber.

Reform of scrutiny by Parliament is already the constitutional flavour of the next decade—the first in the new millennium. Two bodies, of one of which I am a modest member, are examining the issue. Although the Government may not like it, the campaign enjoys considerable intellectual support outside Parliament. An appointments commission, which is the subject of the amendment, established by statute is an important underpinning of the whole process.

The Lord Privy Seal said that the Government have no quarrel with the underlying principle and purpose of the amendment, but the Government's reluctance to accept it at this stage, as demonstrated by the Minister's speech, is profoundly ominous. The Government may imply that the amendment would impede a ready transition to stage 2, and I dare say that they regard that as evidence of their commitment to stage 2. However, in the previous debate, the hon. Member for South Thanet was not widely supported on the Labour Benches in his confidence that we would move to stage 2.

The Government cannot be surprised if some of us think that one constitutional bird in the hand is worth an infinite number in the new Labour bush, and that the Bill will be improved by including a solid constitutional innovation, on top of the more idiosyncratic Weatherill amendment. I had no difficulty in voting for the Weatherill amendment, pragmatism being the heart of Conservatism, but I was a little surprised—Conservatism not being the Prime Minister's present flavour of the month—that the Government also put pragmatism first. We live in strange times.

I have already sketched out the skeleton of a first-class political thriller based on the Weatherill amendment, involving a Genghis Khan-like figure, an Ian Fleming villain in the lonely places of Mongolia, seeking to use the provisions of the amendment, particularly its by-election principle, to avenge the passing of the hereditary principle.

The Weatherill amendment's very bizarreness made it a highly traditional increment to the British constitution, but amendment No. 2 would add something solid to the constitution and would not need bizarreness to recommend it.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): We should not pass the evening without noting the hypocrisy of Opposition Members, who, for 18 years, managed to hide their principled objection to patronage, and supported a system under which they already held a Conservative majority of 3:1 over other parties. Under the system of patronage that they supported, their Prime Minister even vetoed proposals from other political parties. It ill suits the Opposition tonight suddenly to discover that, because there has been a change in political control, what they supported in the past is urgently in need of repair.

Mr. Tyrie: The hon. Gentleman says that Conservative Prime Ministers vetoed nominations from leaders of other political parties. That may be true; I do not know. I should be grateful if he could provide an example.

Dr. Turner: Specifically, no. It was a feature of the past 18 years that the patronage of the Prime Minister was complete in that respect. Conservative Members did not complain then. There is a goodly element of hypocrisy in the case that they bring tonight.

After 365 life peers were appointed, of whom 173 were Tories, even though they had an overwhelming majority in the other House, it ill becomes the Opposition to

[Dr. Turner]

complain when the present Prime Minister has appointed only marginally more than 50 per cent. That does not reflect the proportions of elected representation in the House. The amendment is inadequate for the purpose and, if the House is genuinely to address how to prevent patronage from having in future the importance that it had in the past, we must return to that issue.

I make it clear to my hon. Friend the Minister that it is important that we now deliver on our commitment to ensuring that there is a brief period between phases 1 and 2 of the reform of the House of Lords. We should consider what power the commission should have after we have made up our minds about what not only the function of the House of Lords, but its make-up, should be.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman is developing a most extraordinary theme. Would he care to explain how putting the commission in statutory form impedes moving on to the next stage of the reform of the other place?

Dr. Turner: The point has already been made that what we are being asked to add in by statute addresses but a tiny portion of the problem. We do not know what will be the constitution of the new House that we want to establish in the second phase; nor do we know what its functions and role will be. When we know the purpose of the new House and from what sections of society its Members come, we shall know what form of scrutiny the commission will need to undertake.

Many different views are held by hon. Members about the make-up of the future House. When we have decided that, and what its functions will be, we must return to the issue of scrutiny to ensure that we get rid of the ills of patronage.

Mr. Hogg: The majority of hon. Members who have spoken in the debate have rallied round one proposition: the Minister's speech disappointed. It did so for this reason. He said that the Prime Minister wants to divest himself of patronage and wants to set up an independent commission. He said quite a bit about what the independent commission will be like, although that is not set out in any formal documents, and, as it happens, his remarks were almost identical to the provisions of the Lords amendment. Therefore the House is entitled to say, "If that is the case, why not put it in the Bill?" The arguments advanced by him are simply spurious. He does not want to include such a provision because he knows that, were he to do so, his ability to change his mind and the Government's ability to handle patronage would be diminished. They want to retain flexibility.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hogg: I shall proceed a little more.

I do not want the Government to retain flexibility because I want to stop Governments having great powers of patronage—for that matter, not only Governments, but all parties. The objection of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) to the Lords amendment is wholly right. The genuine criticism is that it does not go far enough. As he said quite correctly, it touches only on the Cross Benchers, which is a pity. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke): it is better to have what we have than to have nothing at all, but it would be better by far if the restriction on the power of patronage extended to the party appointments as well.

I say that for two reasons, and one is that I want the power of the other place to be enhanced, so that it will constitute a much more effective brake on the activities that take place in this Chamber. I do not believe that we can enhance the authority of the other place until it has greater legitimacy, and that is why I agreed so strongly with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) when he spoke of an elected Chamber. I believe in that, and always have. Until we can secure it, however, we must underpin legitimacy in a different way—and one way to do it is by removing the smell of patronage from the process. I believe in democracy.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) sniggers. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is a Whip."] I know that, and it brings me to my second point. The other reason why I am against patronage is that it demeans the House of Commons. We all know—I have been here for 20 years, and know far too well—the ways in which the party machine controls this House, not just my party but, more particularly, the Government party. One of the ways in which it does that is by exercising its power of patronage. I want to take that power away from the party machine, so that we can increase the independence of hon. Members. I also believe that the power of patronage is demeaning to public life. There is a deeply rooted belief, which I consider to be justified, that people can secure preferment in terms of membership of the other place in return for services rendered to the Government of the day.

For all those reasons, I support the Lords amendment. It does not go far enough, but it represents a small step forward, and on that basis, we should welcome it.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): It is an honour to follow my neighbour, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), who, as the elder son of a most distinguished peer, speaks with great knowledge of these matters.

Debates on this subject are always characterised by arguments between what I term the radicals and the ministerialists—or the proto-ministerialists. Radicals can be found on both sides of the House, and, in these debates, I agree with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) when he argues for an elected House. I fear, however, that Chesterfield is the home of lost causes, in the context of this issue and, indeed, others.

It is sad that, on this historic day on which 800 years of history are coming to an end, we should debate one narrow little amendment that could only improve the Bill, and that even that fig leaf should be rejected by the Government. On a day when we are ending 800 years of history, we should create something of which we can be proud: an elected Chamber, a democratic body. Instead, we are debating whether the Government are prepared to include in the Bill provision for a commission to appoint a few Cross-Bench peers—and the Government are rejecting even that on the grounds that it goes too far and is too democratic, on this historic day.

What is so sad is that the establishment—new Labour is the new establishment—will be happy. Everyone is happy. The hereditaries, who have been treated appallingly, have got something out of this. I support the retention of a small number. There should be more—we should have asked for more—but at least some will remain to retain some kind of democratic credibility in the other place. *[Interruption.]* After next week, they will be the only people in the other place who will have been elected by anyone. At least there will be a few there, and they are happy.

The political parties are also happy, because they preserve their right to appoint, through patronage, their own people. I suppose that the Cross Benchers will be happy, whether or not there is an appointments commission. One very large body of people will not be happy: the public. Only the public are excluded. We are talking about half the British Parliament. After this week, a quarter of it will have been appointed by this Prime Minister. If we were talking about Latvia or Estonia, people would consider it an extraordinary state of affairs, but we are talking about the mother of Parliaments. The Government will continue to appoint three Members a week, until half the membership is appointed by the current Prime Minister. The appointments commission is no more than a fig leaf.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, consideration of Lords Amendments to the House of Lords Bill, the Motion in the name of Margaret Beckett relating to Business of the House, and consideration of any Messages from the Lords relating to the House of Lords Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

Lords amendments again considered.

Question again proposed, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

10 pm

Mr. Leigh: At least the amendment would have been something. At least the Prime Minister, or the political party leaders could not have got their sticky fingers on one part of our Parliament—just one small part. We asked for one small thing and even that has been rejected.

What arguments have been advanced today? It has been argued that the amendment may be technically flawed, or that it is not appropriate to put Privy Councillors in an amendment. That is nonsense. The Government should be ashamed of themselves. I hope that at least some Labour Members will have the decency to vote for what is a small amendment.

Mr. Tyrie: In contrast to the previous debate, Conservative Members all agree that we want to keep the Lords amendment. That is also my view, but not because I think that an appointments commission is a tremendously good idea. I would prefer legislators to be chosen by election. It is extraordinary that, in this day and age, as we approach the 21st century, they should be chosen in any other way. Therefore, the commission is not so much second best; it is third best.

The commission is, I suppose, a constraint of sorts on prime ministerial patronage and we do need some constraints on such patronage. The Prime Minister has appointed more life peers per annum than any other since life peers were introduced.

The Minister said earlier that I had got my facts wrong, but I have gone to the Library to check them. They are right. It is also true that the Labour Government have appointed more Labour peers as a proportion of the total number than any Government have ever appointed from their own side. Packing is taking place on a huge scale, so we need something to restrain it.

What is more, patronage will be much more important in the interim House than it is now because there will be far more life peers as a proportion of the total and also means that the House will be smaller. Therefore, any addition to the House is disproportionately more important.

The proposals were set out not just in the Government's own White Paper, but in detail by Baroness Jay in Committee. The drafters of the amendment have clearly gone into that detail. They have looked at what she said and ensured that, as far as possible, the amendment conformed to what the Government want. The Government will vote down their own amendment tonight. It is extraordinary.

Why have the Government decided to turn the amendment down tonight? I cannot think, but we have been given a few reasons. I shall go through a few of them. First, the Minister said—he can correct me if I am wrong—that there is no need for an appointments commission because it is only an interim House; it will be gone in a few minutes, so we do not have to worry about it much. That seems to contradict all the other arguments about the Weatherill amendment, which could last for some considerable time, as several hon. Members have acknowledged. I fear that it may last for a very long time indeed, as the last interim House did: it was introduced in 1911 and we have only just started to reform it.

That may have been the Minister's argument—that the commission would deal only with a temporary House—but Baroness Jay gave exactly the opposite reason when she discussed the measure in the other place. She said that we must get it in quickly and promised that she would do so to deal with the new year's honours list; clearly, that will not now happen.

Baroness Jay made her promise in June and we have had no action since. The only action taken seems to have a been a memo to the Treasury saying, "We need a few bob to start work on the commission, so if we want to spend any money please could we have some?" That would take only 48 hours. I am sure that the Chancellor has ticked it off, so that is no reason for not agreeing to the amendment.

The Minister's second argument was that work on establishing the commission would be impeded simply because the other place has put a proposal on the commission into a Bill. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) said, such an argument could only imply that the Government are planning to establish a different commission from the one proposed in their White Paper, and that Ministers are now halfway down the road and do not want to allow the provision into the Bill.

[Mr. Tyrie]

It is extraordinary to suggest that, every time an amendment on a key issue is tabled in the other place, Government planning should grind to a halt until that amendment has been dealt with. That is not an argument.

The Minister's third argument was that Privy Councillors are entirely unsuitable to serve on the commission. Such a proposition is barely worth debating. The Minister could alter the provision by tabling a small amendment to widen or narrow the list to include those whom hon. Members on both sides of the House think should serve.

Finally, the Minister argued that we could do without a statutory body. That argument gave away much of the truth. If the commission is not statutory, the Prime Minister will be able to change its terms and structure. Consequently, we should have no confidence that there will be an open and transparent system to appoint legislators.

The Minister gave those four reasons for not accepting the amendment, and they were barely worth even articulating. I hope that we shall not hear the arguments again, and that he has kept something up his sleeve to encourage us to think differently.

Mr. Bercow: Do not hold your breath.

Mr. Tyrie: I fear that we shall hear virtually no argument from the Minister, and I certainly shall not hold my breath.

I should be very interested to see whether the Minister has decided that he is prepared after all to concede the matter. If he is not, I should be grateful to hear some better reasons for not doing so other than those that he has given us so far.

Mr. Grieve: This has been a fascinating debate, and perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the lot is that, in presenting the Government's arguments, the Minister has been entirely unsupported by any intervention of substance by a Labour Member.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grieve: I shall in a moment.

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that the Government's intention today, once the Weatherill amendment had been debated, was that the appointments issue—which is critical to the future of the House of Lords, and to the future of freedom and democracy in the United Kingdom—should simply be wafted away with a wave of the hand.

I listened to the Minister's speech, and—it is customary to say this, and I join in saying it—I am completely satisfied about his own integrity and the assurances that he gave the House on the Government's good intentions. However, if the intervention of the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) demonstrated the quality of the mainstream Labour party's input into the future of accountability and ending patronage, the House has something to fear from the Government.

In a series of interventions by Opposition Members—by my right hon. and learned Friends the Members for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh)—what has shone through is that, regardless of how we view the ideal solution for the House of Lords, we are all deeply anxious about the matter of patronage, and that the future House, whether elected or appointed, should be free of patronage.

Mr. Bermingham: It would have been so much more pleasant if the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) had given way earlier. My point is very simple: we are waiting for Wakeham. Once the Wakeham commission reports, we shall know where we are going. It is far too early for Lords amendment No. 2.

Mr. Grieve: With respect, that intervention worries me rather a lot too. One of the central problems in all this is that we were invited to go through a temporary stage and were offered some permanent stage at a later date. However, the temporary stage is so flawed by the absence of safeguards that should be present—in particular, the appointment of members to the upper House—that it gives us real cause for concern.

We can go on waiting for Wakeham for a long time. When it comes, the safeguards will not be in place, so if the Government decide never to implement a second stage, as many of us strongly fear, these safeguards will never come into operation, or if they do, because they will not be in a statutory form, the Government will have every opportunity if they so wish to remove them with impunity and without so much as a reference to the House.

I do not want to take up the time of the House by repeating arguments, but a couple of points merit going over. There were three powerful interventions from Labour Members who, as I understood it, shared the Opposition's disquiet in this matter—the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) and, although he may correct me, I also detected a considerable amount of anxiety in the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman).

This solution may be imperfect. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central correctly identified all the other areas where it might be desirable for an appointments commission to rule, not merely on the appointment of Cross-Bench peers but of all future peers if it is to be an appointed Chamber, whether it be temporary or—as we all fear—permanent. Which is the better—that we should not signal tonight at least an appreciation of what members of the House of Lords have tried to do or that we should simply say that we will wait on assurances from the Government for some future date?

It is a little difficult to criticise members of the other place for what one might describe as the conservative approach that they adopted in tabling the amendment, when all that they sought to do was to mirror the assurances that the Government had given. Had they gone much further, they would have been open to all sorts of criticism. Therefore, they were greatly to be commended

for the fact that they chose only to take a tentative step. However, if it is only a tentative step, it does not make it negligible. If we go ahead and put down a proper sign that that is the direction in which we ought to be going, it will be difficult subsequently for any Government to gainsay it. To await the assurances of the Minister in this matter appears a counterproductive step and one that risks the danger that the Government will say that it can all be dismissed because there was not real concern in the House about the matter.

I appeal to the Minister and his colleagues, who have given the matter a lot of careful thought and who joined a debate on the nature of the second Chamber that we all seek earlier this year, to reflect carefully whether the amendment tabled is not sufficiently valid that it ought to command support, even if it does not go as far as they would wish to ensure that all appointments to the second Chamber are in the hands at least of an independent commission, not of the Prime Minister alone.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde expressed concern about the amendment in so far as it refers to Northern Ireland. I appreciate that concern, but in truth there is nothing in it that prevents the appointment of peers who come from Northern Ireland, if the Prime Minister so wishes. Of course, it might be more desirable that that, too, should be in the hands of an appointments commission. They will not necessarily be Cross Benchers, but, in itself, there is nothing to prevent that in the amendment and the hon. Gentleman should not be deterred from following his conscience, if that is what is troubling him in this matter, on that single issue.

Finally, it has been said that this is all temporary and that we should not spend so much time on measures that are only temporary. This House has spent hours on the Bill—a measure that we are told is to be temporary. If the Government had been willing to go to the trouble of framing some sensible amendments to the Lords amendment, it would have taken very little more time.

The Government's position is untenable. They indulge in pious hand-wringing about the good intentions of the House of Lords, but they refuse to do anything. It is for those of us who believe in accountability and reducing the powers of patronage to ensure that our message is brought home to the Government this evening.

10.15 pm

Mr. Tipping: I should like to reply briefly to some of the points that have been raised. I am conscious that I need to make rapid progress.

It has been said that this is the first opportunity that the House has had to discuss the matter, but it was discussed at length in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) argued strongly with a Scottish voice, as ever. I am conscious of the points that he made and we shall ensure that they are taken forward.

Some Labour Members, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), have argued that our proposals do not go far enough. They have radical views on the second stage. They were right to point out that the amendment is about only the Cross Benchers.

Several hon. Members have asked me what the Government's plans are. They are set out at some length in chapter six of the White Paper on reform of the House of Lords. I ask hon. Members to look at that. Some have argued that the amendment is not very different from the Government's plans. They are right. The two are very similar.

That brings me to the key issue: why is there no such measure in the Bill? The answer is very straightforward. We want to go down a tried and tested route—one that has been set by Nolan and Neill and that we know can and will work. We are also conscious that the interim House will be a transitional and temporary measure. We do not want to give the impression that the interim stage will be very long.

Several hon. Members have asked us to make progress. We are determined to do so and we are happy to be judged on our record.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 353, Noes 133.

Division No. 319] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fearn, Ronnie

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Jacqui Lait and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendment No. 3 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 4, after clause 2, to insert the following new clause—*Voting rights of life peers: extension of duration of Parliament*—

" . In respect of any proceedings in the House of Lords on a Bill providing for the maximum duration of Parliament to be extended beyond five years, no peer appointed to the House of Lords under the Life Peerages Act 1958 during the course of that Parliament shall be entitled to vote on such proceedings."

10.30 pm

Mr. Tipping: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

This amendment is unnecessary, nasty and will not achieve its objective. It is a mean little amendment that purports to provide an additional safeguard—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. There is a general buzz of conversation. The House must listen to the Minister.

Mr. Tipping: The amendment purports to provide an additional safeguard against an attempt to extend the life of Parliament. Under the Parliament Act 1911, the House of Lords retains an absolute veto on any legislation to achieve such an effect. The Government made it clear in the White Paper and elsewhere that we think that that veto should be retained. We recognise the importance of that constitutional safeguard and have no intention of undermining it. We made it clear that it should be retained not only in the transitional House, but in the fully reformed House.

The amendment suggests that some Members of the House of Lords should not be allowed to vote on a Bill to extend the life of a Parliament, irrespective of their party, the reason for their nomination as life peers, or the quality of their contribution to debates. The only criterion to be applied is the date of their patent. Some Members of the House of Lords are always potentially to be considered second class and untrustworthy, at least until they survive a general election, when they miraculously become first class and honourable.

When this amendment was debated in the House of Lords, the Conservatives totally failed to explain why they thought that protection against the power of a Government determined to extend their life should be needed now. They tried only two justifications for their approach. First—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who do not want to hear the Minister leave the Chamber and continue their conversations outside?

Mr. Tipping: First, the Conservatives argued that the hereditary peers are uniquely independent of the blandishments of party and the siren calls of short-term expediency. Secondly, they argued that the balance of numbers in the House now means that it is much easier for the Government of the day to pack the House. Neither proposition is true and both are deeply insulting to life peers, especially to those from this party.

Mr. Bercow: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We all take note of your exhortations, but would not our proceedings be greatly assisted if the Minister addressed the House without muttering into his notes so that his speech is inaudible?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The House would be better able to hear the Minister if we had fewer contributions from a sedentary position, including those from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Tipping: It is no easier now for any party to achieve a majority in the House of Lords than it has been for the Conservative party—indeed, it is rather less so. Life peers are just as honourable, just as independent in

[Mr. Tipping]

their views and have just as great a sense of public service as hereditary peers. What is being suggested is an insult to the integrity of life peers and of those who might in the future be honoured with life peerages.

The amendment would not even achieve its desired effect. To a Government really determined on such a course, there are several ways round even this obstacle. For example, a Government reasonably confident of their position could pack the House first, call a general election and then repeal the Septennial Act. There is a strange paradox—

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Tipping: No.

The proposal in the amendment would be effective only in the context of a rational, law-abiding Government, and in that context, it is quite unnecessary.

I urge that this amendment be rejected.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I do not know about insults, but I think that that non-argument was an insult to this House. This is a very simple amendment to which I shall address very few words, and I will make sure that they are audible. It seeks to prevent life peers appointed in the course of a Parliament from voting in any proceedings that provide for the extension of the life of the Parliament beyond five years. That is an extremely simple proposition to which no democratic Member of this House ought to have any objection.

We heard earlier that when the House of Lords meets next week, on 17 November, a quarter of its members will have been appointed in the past two and a half years by the current Prime Minister—

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Not enough.

Sir Patrick Cormack: That remark makes my case that the House of Lords could be packed and, at the Government's behest, vote to prolong the life of Parliament.

There is a precedent for the amendment being made. The Parliament Acts that are currently in force specifically and deliberately leave untouched the absolute power of the House of Lords to reject any Bill to extend the life of Parliament.

I cast no aspersions on anyone present this evening; nor do I doubt for half a second the integrity of the Parliamentary Secretary, whom I respect. I do not even doubt what the Prime Minister might do. All I say is that the amendment is not one that any democratically elected Government need fear. It is a simple and emphatic statement that ought to command the universal respect and support of this House.

Many dictatorships have begun with elected Governments, and we do not want one ever to be inflicted on this country. I do not suggest that there is one currently in prospect, but we are debating an upper House with an indeterminate life span. All we want is to write in a simple safeguard, which takes nothing away from the Government's proposals, but merely reaffirms something that every democratically elected Government ought to reaffirm. I urge the House to come to a quick decision and to vote emphatically in favour of the amendment.

Mr. Forth: The amendment deals with an important matter, because it touches on nothing less than the role of the upper House as a safeguard of our constitution. Few matters can be more important than that and anyone who has given the amendment even the most cursory consideration will fully understand its import.

Despite that, the debate was given only the most superficial introduction by the Minister. I do not know whether he was ashamed of his argument, whether he did not fully understand his argument, or whether he was patronising the House in a manner with which we have become all too familiar. Whatever the reason, we have been given little to work on, so we shall have to use our imagination when trying to understand the issues. Therefore, the process might take a little longer than it might have taken had the Minister given us a proper explanation. A little detailed consideration will be required as a result of the Minister being unhelpful to the House, but I shall attempt to set the scene as best I can, so that the debate can run its proper course.

We are considering how the upper House is properly to fulfil its important role of safeguarding the constitution against any possibility of an extension to the term of a Parliament. Throughout history, that issue has arisen from time to time, often in extremely dramatic circumstances. Although it has not arisen in the recent past, the size of the current Government's majority in the House of Commons gives cause for anxiety about the possibility of an attempt being made to extend Parliament's term.

The irony is that the size of the Government's majority in this place brings the issue to the surface. We are entitled to be somewhat suspicious of the possible consequences. In a bicameral system, if one House comprises an overwhelming number of Members from the same party, we will rely more on the other House—in this case, the upper House—to provide vital safeguards against prolonging the life of a Parliament.

That is the background to this issue, and I turn to the details of the amendment. Paradoxically, the Minister gave us a clue—I do not think he intended to do so—when he used the phrase "pack the House". He obviously thinks that a future Government or Prime Minister could seek to—I use the Minister's words—pack the upper House with Members who would then influence votes in that place. If that is on the Minister's mind, it should certainly be on hon. Members' minds as we consider this amendment.

I may have come to this debate innocent of such matters; it may be that that point did not occur to me. However, even a cursory hearing of the Minister's comments would have alerted me to the fact that he thinks that the House of Lords could be packed by this or a future Prime Minister. That is why we must consider this amendment very seriously.

I thought it rather odd when the Minister went on to say that it would be an insult to life peers—he used those words—if we agreed to the amendment. A common theme has run through the debates tonight that I will characterise as, "Trust me, I'm from the Government; leave it all to me and don't worry". That is what the Minister implied in the previous debate when he resisted an attempt to put

what amounted to his own proposals into the Bill to act as a perfectly natural, simple safeguard. When dealing with constitutional matters, what could be more natural than having on the face of legislation as important as this details of the mechanisms upon which we shall rely to settle future arrangements? That is a perfectly reasonable expectation. Yet in the previous debate, the Minister tried to persuade us that we need not—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I do not want the right hon. Gentleman to dwell on the previous debate because we have moved on.

Mr. Forth: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I was trying to set the scene before exploring the details of my argument.

The Minister's comments in opening this debate were a reverberation of his previous remarks. He said that we do not need the natural safeguards and reassurances proposed by the amendment. He urged hon. Members to trust him, the Government and the Prime Minister because they would not dream of doing the sorts of things that the Minister himself suggested—that is, packing the upper House. This amendment seeks to guard against that eventuality.

In a sense, it is a simple proposition. We have reached a crucial stage in our consideration of this Bill, which introduces important constitutional arrangements. Those arrangements are even more significant because we have no idea how long the so-called temporary measures will be in place. If the Minister had given us a time scale or a point of reference, that might have provided the sort of reassurance that we seek. However, the absence of any commitments from the Government as to how long the temporary arrangements will last strengthens the argument that the Bill should include the reassurances that this amendment would provide. That argument applied beforehand, and it is even more applicable now.

10.45 pm

The Minister might even now be regretting the fact that he and the Leader of the House have persistently failed to give us any guidance, comfort or reassurance about whether the so-called temporary arrangement may be very brief. Instead, we have been led to believe that it could last for some considerable time. There is talk of the commission, which is at present considering the matter, and joint Committees of the House, and intriguing and tantalising references to the need for consensus and widespread agreement if we are to move forward. It seems to me that the possibilities for resolving the matter in the foreseeable future will be far fewer if the Government are seeking consensus or widespread agreement.

When one puts together all the factors, including the fact that we have been given no time scale and that the Government say that they are seeking a consensual approach to the next stage, that suggests that the time frame is likely to be much longer than we would have otherwise expected. That must surely strengthen the argument for the amendment.

I am afraid that I am not, on this occasion, prepared simply to trust the Minister, the Government and the Prime Minister. I believe that these matters transcend the simple act of faith that is being asked of us. It is our duty to provide the people of this country with a degree of reassurance and comfort and a safeguard of the kind that the amendment would give them, rather than expect them naively to trust the Government. I do not feel able to trust the Government, and I cannot do so on behalf of anyone else. I fear that unless the Minister is prepared, at the end of the debate, to give us much more information and reassurance, we must insist that the amendment is adhered to. We support it very strongly, and we send that strong message to the Government.

Mr. Fallon: Of the three debates that we have had today, this is the most important. It is, therefore, all the more disgraceful that the Minister put up no serious argument against the amendment. An argument was made against it in another place to the effect that it would not bite on section 2 of the Parliament Act 1911. That argument is wrong. The amendment would address a central weakness of that section, and I shall explain why.

It is in that Act that the Lords retain their absolute power of veto over any proposal to extend the life of a Parliament. That is sometimes referred to as their reserve power. Indeed, it is probably on everybody's wish list of residual, nuclear powers for the reformed upper House. However, it is important to understand—my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) put this point exactly—that the power to veto any attempt to extend the life of a Parliament is not an exception to the 1911 Act, but it is the rest of that Act that is itself the exception.

In the rest of the Act, the House of Lords delegates to this House its normal right to assent to public Bills. It does so in the particular prescribed circumstances in which the Parliament Acts are applied to insist on legislation, first within two years, and then within one year. However, it was always a gap in the 1911 Act that the reserve power was restricted only to the life of a Parliament and not to the composition of a Parliament. That is what the amendment seeks to redress.

There is a reason for that gap in the 1911 Act, which is that the Act was always designed to be temporary. The composition of Parliament was then subject to a separate report, and it was always envisaged that the 1911 Act would be rapidly replaced, so it did not occur to the draftsmen to state in the 1911 Act, or the 1949 Act, that any Bill affecting the composition as well as the duration of Parliament should also be exempted from the operation of the Act. The amendment would restore that protection. I assume that, when the Government finally make their stage 2 proposals, they will include a measure such that both Houses would in future have to assent to any Bill that affected Parliament itself; otherwise, we should reform the second House, but retain the right for this place to change it all again if we did not like it. It must be right to address that lacuna in the 1911 Act.

More than 20 years ago, when the Home committee examined these matters, it gave some thought to entrenchment. I was delighted to see that the amendment was moved in the other place by Lord Mancroft, whose father was a distinguished vice-chairman of the Home committee and played his part in its deliberations. Whatever criticism we might make of the amendment, we cannot claim that it is meaningless. It prevents the House of Lords from being packed for a purpose, and that purpose would be to extend the duration of Parliament. The amendment insists that new life peers cannot vote until a new election has taken place.

[Mr. Fallon]

In the other place, two arguments were made against the amendment by Lord Williams of Mostyn who, amazingly, is now the Attorney-General. He put two of the weakest arguments that I have ever heard. First, he said that the amendment could not of itself amend the 1911 Act. However, if it forms part of this Bill, there is a strong argument for including it in the major Bill that is to follow this one. We would thus be able to restore the gap in the 1911 Act.

Secondly, he said that the Government could still pack the House just before an election. That concedes the danger that we are trying to guard against. The Government are already considering circumstances in which a House could be packed. However, at least in those circumstances, there would be an election.

The Minister's rather garbled defence of his case rests on trust. He says, "We would not do it", and that the House can trust this Government and this Prime Minister not to monkey about with our constitution. For two and a half years, our constitution has been vandalised; the powers of this House have been given away to unelected bodies in Europe and to a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. Later tonight, perhaps we shall see two thirds of one of our Houses of Parliament expelled, but the Government ask us to trust them on the constitution. If the amendment were accepted, we would strengthen the House of Lords and we put down a marker for the final reform to which the Government are committed.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I had no intention of speaking in these debates until I heard the unbelievably weak case put by the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office. Why oppose the measure? If the Government want to carry out reform and they want to be trusted, why not put the measure into law?

I apologise to Members of the other place because we may be preventing them from dealing with the Bill when they had hoped to do so. However, the matter is one of great importance and they must realise that. They voted for the measure so we have a right to ensure that trust is best put in the law. If matters are part of legislation, they cannot be thrown away and there is no need to trust anybody—it would be the law. I need to hear better arguments than I have read in the reports of the House of Lords proceedings, or have heard from Members on the Treasury Bench. Why are Labour Members not willing to table measures in which they believe? If they believe that the Government should not be able to prolong their own life, they must surely have nothing against the amendment. It is only when one doubts or does not believe that what is being said is absolute that one can be against the amendment. We are asking that the provision be included in the Bill. I believe that their lordships would want us to do exactly that, however long we must debate the point.

Mr. Robathan: I support the arguments of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front and Back Benches, but in doing so invoke the spirit of history. I remind hon. Members on both sides of the House that the reason why we have Acts that determine how long a Parliament should run dates backs to the mid-17th century and the Long Parliament. Since then, the length of a Parliament and whether a discredited Government could extend their time in office have been critical.

I tried to intervene on the Minister, but, unfortunately, his nose was so deeply buried in his speech that he would not accept any interventions. I ask him in his brief winding-up speech—I am sure that it will be brief—to answer this question: are there any circumstances in which he would support an extension of a Parliament? If there are no such circumstances, why is he opposing the amendment? The amendment is solely to stop the upper House being packed. I hope that he will withdraw his opposition to the amendment.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): When one sees a Minister put his nose in his notes, gabble his speech and ignore any interventions, one knows that he probably has a pretty weak argument and is somewhat ashamed of it. It was presented to us as though it was somehow an impertinence that we should be questioning the Government's good intentions. The provision is the most important democratic safeguard that our Parliament will have. It is extremely important that we spend time not only debating the point but making it clear to the Government and people outside the House.

The Minister's arguments turned on the role of the hereditary peers in preventing the Government from extending their term in office beyond that of a Parliament. Those arguments are largely irrelevant. This House has just agreed the Weatherill amendment to leave only 92 hereditary peers. The vast majority of peers with whom we shall entrust the task will be life peers, so the only arguments in the Minister's speech were bogus.

The Minister asked us to believe that any rational, law-abiding Government would in no way wish to extend their own life by packing the House of Lords. At what point does a rational, law-abiding Government become a criminal, irrational Government? There is a continuum between those judgments. I believe that it is thoroughly irrational to ban beef on the bone, but the governing party thinks that such a policy is rational. I believe that bombing Kosovo was of highly dubious legality, as do a number of Labour Members. So one man's rational and law-abiding Government is another man's irrational and possibly criminal Government.

Amazingly, as a result, the only institution that is left to defend democracy against a Government who wish to sustain themselves in office by such means is the sovereign—what an extraordinary position. We are debating a Bill to remove the main hereditary element from our constitution, but managing at the same time to leave the defence of democracy in the only remaining hereditary part of it. That is the absurdity of the Government's position.

11 pm

Mr. Grieve: If anything characterises the extraordinary approach that the Government have taken to the whole Bill, it is the way in which they have reacted to Lords amendment No. 4. I tell the Minister, who got so worked up in presenting, at gabbling speed, the Government's position, that I believe that if the proposal had been suggested as an amendment to the Parliament Act 1949, without there being any reform of the House of Lords, it

would have commended itself to the House, at least for serious consideration. Anything that strengthens our liberties, anything that ensures that this country could not, under certain circumstances, sink into dictatorship, is worth that consideration. I am amazed by the reception that it has received from the Minister and the complete absence of comment on it by Labour Members.

The amendment is perfectly straightforward and sensible. It must be judged against a situation, which I appreciate that the Minister will say is justified, in which the Government have been creating peers on an unprecedented scale. With that sort of instability introduced into our system, it is doubly necessary that we should consider such an amendment.

In the debate in the other place, the Baroness Park, not normally noted for her partisanship, had this to say on the matter:

"I greatly respect many of my friends on the Opposition Benches. I feel sure that if they think about it they will accept that we are thinking about the future of the country. It is all very well saying that the people would rebel. If there is one thing about the British, it is that they never notice anything that is happening to them until it has happened. That is why we always win wars at the last moment. We cannot afford to put this particular liberty at risk."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 June 1999; Vol. 603, c. 296.]

I hope that the Minister, in closing the debate, will rise to the occasion as he has signally failed to do so far. The amendment is clear cut and sensible. It would stand the test even if the Bill were not being passed. With the changes that are being brought about, it is doubly necessary.

Mr. Tipping: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This important debate has focused on the historic safeguards that the House of Lords has given us for many years. This is an important and historic day. Many of our friends and colleagues in the upper House will be leaving us shortly. From the Treasury Bench, I want to thank them for their years of service. I wish them well for the future. I want it to be clear to them that my colleagues and friends on the Labour Benches acknowledge the years of service that they have been given. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I will not tolerate this noise. The Minister is addressing the House.

Mr. Tipping: I am addressing those colleagues and friends in the House of Lords who have given us years of service. I place on record our thanks to them and wish them well. I wish the new life peers who will now dominate the upper House the same rights, the same traditions and the same responsibilities. Undoubtedly, the new life peers will continue to safeguard our constitution, and the amendment is unnecessary. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am about to put the Question. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) should not be shouting across the Floor.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 355, Noes 130.

Division No. 320] **[11.4 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate

Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and Mr. Tony McNulty.

NOES

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew

Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos 5 to 12 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 13 disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill; that Mrs. Margaret Beckett, Mr. Ivor Caplin, Sir Patrick Cormack, Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mrs. Anne McGuire be members of the Committee; that Mrs. Margaret Beckett be the Chairman of the Committee; that three be the quorum of the Committee; and that the Committee do withdraw immediately.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

11.19 pm

Mr. Forth: This is a particularly important Committee, at this of all times. The matters that we have been considering this evening are of the greatest historical and constitutional importance. We should therefore pay particular attention to the motion, in a number of respects.

The first question that I raise is whether it is appropriate for the Committee to meet immediately. I should have thought that it would be more productive if there were a period of reflection between the completion of debate and the Committee's establishment. Many complicated matters have been dealt with during the debate. It might add to the quality of the Committee's reflection and deliberations were there to be a delay, perhaps until tomorrow, before it sat to reflect on that debate.

Mr. Swayne: Given that the Committee is specifically charged with drawing up reasons to be given to their lordships, and that no reasons were evident at all from Labour Members, it clearly needs plenty of time to dwell on the matter.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because he has touched on a relevant matter. To the extent to which the Minister has failed to give adequate arguments to the House—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman should speak strictly to the motion. If there is any deviation from the motion, I will bring him, and anyone who intervenes, to order.

Mr. Forth: I have no doubt of that at all.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) pointed us in a useful direction. He pointed out the relationship between the responsibilities of the Reasons Committee properly to put together the House's reasons to another place for our conclusions on the amendments, and the Minister's failure, which has been oft repeated, to give adequate reasons for the Government's attitude to the amendments; so there is a double responsibility on the Committee.

This would not normally be the case. If the Minister had properly discharged his responsibilities, the Committee would have had much less to do. As it is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not want the right hon. Gentleman to revisit the debates that we have had. He should speak to the motion and to nothing else.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful.

That brings me to the membership of the Committee. Looking down the list of members that has been proposed, I find that some of them have, indeed, taken part in the debates this evening. Members who have participated in the debate, understand it, have been here throughout and can express its nuances and ambience to the House of Lords, would be particularly appropriate, but I notice that the list of members includes, by my reckoning, at least two who have not participated in the debate. That must raise a question. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name them."] I will not embarrass anyone. I raise the matter because it is relevant. Does the House consider it appropriate for members who have not participated in the debate to be part of the Reasons Committee? Can they fully give the flavour of the debate to another place?

Mr. Bercow: In view of the doubts about the credentials of some of the members of the Reasons Committee, does my right hon. Friend agree that it might be reasonable to suggest that the period of reflection for those members should be no less than that which the Government propose between stage 1 and stage 2?

Mr. Forth: I suspect that, if I were to pursue that matter, the Deputy Speaker would deal with me harshly. However, my hon. Friend's intervention brings another thought to mind.

In the light of what I have just said about the Committee's membership, might it not be more appropriate if *Hansard* were available to the Committee members, so that they might consider our debate and better express the reasons to the other place? If the House

[Mr. Forth]

were to agree with me on that proposition, it would lead very naturally to the conclusion that the Committee would do better to convene tomorrow morning, with *Hansard* available to it, to deal with a long and necessarily complicated debate.

I should like to move on quickly to the matter of the quorum. It was suggested that the Committee's quorum be three. Although that may be appropriate in normal circumstances, I really wonder whether, given the matter's complexity and importance, three is adequate. It would be possible, however theoretically, that the quorum could be composed entirely of Labour Members. The Committee could therefore deliberate with only three Labour Members, but no Opposition Members. Would that be acceptable or appropriate?

Mr. Fallon: If the quorum continues as three, would it not follow that two thirds of it could consist of hon. Members who did not participate in the debate?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right. If we pursue the matter to its logical conclusion, it would indeed be possible for the Committee properly to deliberate with the proposed quorum, which could be dominated by hon. Members who had not participated in the debate. I should have to question the validity of such deliberations, and ask whether the House would be satisfied with the type of account that such a Committee could give of our deliberations in another place, given the seriousness of the matters that we have been considering.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the composition of the Committee—which includes not only great men, such as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), but new hon. Members who have no experience of constitutional matters and are merely placemen working for the Leader of the House—demonstrates Labour Members' contempt for the other place?

Mr. Forth: I cannot agree with my hon. Friend on that, as I regard the vote and view of all hon. Members as absolutely equal and of equal value. That is not my difference with the Committee's membership—which I explained in a different context—or with the quorum. However, I am worried about the quorum.

Before we approve the Committee, given the constitutional importance and sensitivity of the matters that it will be dealing with, we shall need a much more satisfactory explanation about the quality of its deliberations, and its ability properly to reflect the House's deliberations and conclusions. I should have thought that those were perfectly reasonable subjects of concern.

Mr. Fallon: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forth: I shall, but I do want to draw to a conclusion.

Mr. Fallon: I know that my right hon. Friend wants to make progress, as do I, but, in view of the deficiencies of the proposed Committee, I wonder whether he has considered putting forth his own name for the Committee.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is all too kind—and I would be prepared to volunteer. As he will know, I have sat through most of the debate and, in my modest way, participated once or twice. I think that I could make a contribution to the Committee's deliberations, but I shall leave that for others to decide. Nevertheless, the suggestion raises an interesting procedural point.

Given the reservations that I have expressed about the Committee, I wonder whether it is possible for us to amend its timing, composition or quorum—or whether it is a take it or leave it proposition.

If the House expressed its wish in a Division not to establish the Reasons Committee because it agreed with any of my arguments about the timing, the membership or the quorum, we would need guidance as to where we should go from here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that you will reassure me that we cannot simply be offered an off-the-cuff proposition on a take-it-or-leave-it basis about a Committee as important as this, without any opportunity to amend it.

I am asking for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to how the House can effectively express its opinion about the matter and how it might go about altering anything before deciding whether to approve the establishment of the Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Has the right hon. Gentleman finished?

Mr. Forth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will then put the Question.

Mr. Blunt: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Further to the points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I seek guidance about our ability to amend the resolution of the House if we support him in the Division and wish to change the membership of the Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was taking part in a debate and, in any case, every word that he addresses is to the Chair. At this time of night, I am not here to educate hon. Members. It is entirely up to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) whether he wants to vote for or to support the motion that I am about to put to the House.

Question put:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Would the Serjeant at Arms please investigate the delay in the No Lobby?

The House having divided: Ayes 331, Noes 28.

Division No. 321] **[11.32 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malkaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George

Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverhton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Arness, David
Beggs, Roy
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gale, Roger
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Paterson, Owen
Robathan, Andrew
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Swayne, Desmond
Viggers, Peter
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Crispin Blunt and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If, tomorrow morning—after Treasury questions and after the *Official Report* for today is available—the Prime Minister asked to make a statement correcting his statement this afternoon that the married persons allowance would be available to someone retiring after April next year, would it be in order for that statement to be taken before Prorogation?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair. It is entirely up to the Prime Minister whether he wishes to make a statement.

PETITION

Pensioners

11.49 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Pensioners presented me with this petition before the statements in the House yesterday by my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Social Security. I am sure that they will have been pleased to learn of the additional benefits that they will receive, but I know that they would still want their request to be given serious consideration.

The petition of the Senior Citizens' Forum for Better Pensions:

Declares that the state pension for senior citizens is not enough to live on with dignity. Pensioners are getting poorer.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Social Security to restore the link between pensions and wages to help us, the pensioners of today, who have gone through two world wars

And the Petitioners remain.

The petition was signed by 150 pensioners in my constituency.

To lie upon the Table.

Long Ashton (Green Belt)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

11.50 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): After a debate as momentous as this evening's, when we ended 800 years of our history with the imposition of a halfway house of yes-men placed by the Prime Minister, a debate on greenbelt land in a small village in Somerset may seem inconsequential. However, it is not only of great importance to people who live in the village but a classic example of what is happening up and down this land, where local residents living in rural communities are battling against often inappropriate developments.

I do not expect hon. Members to know where Long Ashton is, but, for those who are interested, it lies south of Bristol in the north of my constituency, in north Somerset. The village has a treasured mediaeval history and a strong local identity. Although it lies closer to Bristol than any other village in my constituency, it is definitely part of north Somerset.

Woodspring is not a not-in-my-backyard constituency. It has taken more of than its share of development in recent years. The towns of Clevedon, Nailsea and Portishead have all taken large expanses of new house building because we recognise that new houses need to be built and that people need to live somewhere. In particular, those who have grown up in local communities need some continuity through the availability of housing in those places. A recent example of how people feel let down is the development in East Portishead, which was supposedly going to take the housing allocation for that part of north Somerset. It is not yet complete, but new large-scale house building developments are proposed without any other local infrastructure being provided.

The development that I am discussing tonight lies south of the Long Ashton road, on a hillside overlooking the Long Ashton bypass. Anyone who has taken that road south of Bristol will know that the village is set on a large expanse of hillside green belt which would disappear under the development. Six previous inquiries have given reasoned argument against building houses on this greenfield site. We believe that the inspector in the most recent inquiry took a cavalier approach to the development. Many believe that we are witnessing the rape of the rural south-west and that developers will not be happy until large parts of the rural south-west are concreted over and an urban conurbation running from the southern border of Bristol to Weston-super-Mare and the sea is created.

Several general questions arise. First, many suspect, in my constituency and well beyond, that the dice are loaded too heavily in favour of the developers. When inquiry after inquiry has found in favour of local residents, it takes only one to find in favour of the developers, and the land is gone for ever. The local residents have to fight on and on and on, but the developers have to be lucky only once. That is not a party political point but something that is felt up and down the country in constituencies represented by hon. Members of all parties. There is a problem of local accountability because the developers seem to have everything stacked in their favour.

There is a second democratic question to be answered. Given that the local Member of Parliament, the district councillor, the district council, the local councillors, teachers, doctors, environmentalists, parents—in fact, everyone involved in the local community—oppose the development, how can an inspector who has no links with the area, no understanding of the area and no share in its values come in after so many inquiries have taken place, adopt the contrary view and suddenly decide that the green land is to disappear for ever? The Minister who is to reply to the debate wrote to me, saying:

"I appreciate that this outcome may disappoint you and a number of your constituents, but I can assure you that the decision to grant planning permission was taken only after the most careful consideration of the evidence submitted by the interested parties."

Every single interested party—other than the developers, of course—opposed the development, so the final outcome appears to reflect a strange balance of the interests.

The policies of Governments past and present dictate that no development should take place in the sort of green rural area represented by the site in question. Apart from the obvious destruction of a valuable amenity, the fact that certain specific principles of housing have been ignored causes great concern. Like us, the Government believe that new houses and jobs should be created together. The development in Long Ashton would simply increase commuter traffic to Bristol; there are already long queues out of the village at peak times. There are no alternative routes and more commuters will make matters far worse.

That goes against present Government policy and is to the detriment, not only of the local community, but of the Bristol highways authority, which is desperately trying to reduce traffic entering the city. Brownfield sites in Bristol should be used for residential development, rather than for increasing office premises, because there are already far too many people travelling in and out of Bristol each day. Modern electronic communications mean that there is no need for offices to be located close to each other. In addition, although any development should be designed to maintain, as far as is possible, the traditional characteristics of the local community, the development in question threatens Long Ashton in a way that is utterly inconsistent with that principle.

We have been dealt a second blow: not only has the development that will result in the destruction of a large area of the green land surrounding the village been given the go-ahead, but we have learned that the Long Ashton research station is to be closed. We discovered that, not in the normal way through a statement being made, but via a press release and a letter from Lord Sainsbury dated 5 August. He writes:

"As you know, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council . . . have been reviewing the future development of the Institute of Arable Crops Research, of which the Long Ashton Research Station forms part, and it has reached the conclusion detailed in the enclosed press release.

This involves concentration of research and investment at the Rothamsted site"—

in Hertfordshire—

"and phased withdrawal from Long Ashton, with the transfer of some of the staff and work to Rothamsted."

[Dr. Liam Fox]

In an example of hand washing that makes Pontius Pilate look like an amateur, Lord Sainsbury adds:

"The BBSRC Council is responsible for its own decisions on the structure, development and operation of its Institutes. This responsibility flows from the Council's Royal Charter . . . As I explained when we met"—

I did indeed meet the Minister—

"I am satisfied that, on this occasion also, any decision on restructuring must remain properly with the council."

The village faces major problems as a result of that decision. Unemployment will be created and a valuable source of income to the local economy will disappear. The phased withdrawal, which the Minister suggests will take place over three years, will allow not the sudden transfer of the expertise that he claims is sought, but cherry picking of the best staff, with those who do not want to transfer from north Somerset to Hertfordshire disappearing into the private sector, as has already occurred to a large extent. The closure will also mean a diminution of the research and development base in the south-west.

In addition, the planning decision that I have already set out must make it more likely that land currently controlled by the research station will become available for house building. The university of Bristol, which owns the land, will see an increase in the value of that land, and the financial constraints under which the university labours will make its sale to developers all the more likely.

Those are bad precedents to set for the village, but there are others also. The development in Long Ashton and the potential development of the research station land—which is quite extensive—must set precedents for further building applications in that transport corridor. It must mean that villages such as Backwell, Yatton and Wrington will be vulnerable to the same sort of planning application that has been granted in Long Ashton. My constituents and I are filled with horror when we consider how much of our green land could be lost. The prospect of becoming a single urban conurbation is indeed a horror story.

I would like the Minister to address several specific questions this evening. The Secretary of State will make this decision, as the Minister stated in her letter. How is this application different from the six previous applications that were turned down by the inspector, and therefore by the Secretary of State? What measures will the Government take to protect such greenfield sites in future?

There is a fear in the countryside that we have an urban-dominated Administration who do not care for the countryside. Perhaps most importantly, can the Minister explain the calculation of the housing numbers on which such developments are based? What figures do the civil servants—who no doubt retire to their homes in the home counties and do not have to consider the impact of developments—use to arrive at the numbers? It is a great mystery how the vast numbers of houses are calculated. Why do we need so many new houses and why must they be located in the south-west?

We have made our plans clear: we believe in having a green gap in each town where building of this sort cannot take place. That approach contrasts starkly with recent ministerial and inspectors' decisions. My constituent, Mr. Barnes of Well Close in Long Ashton, put it well when he wrote:

"After 30 years of the villagers trying to protect OUR GREEN VALLEY I was shocked to learn"—

that the Secretary of State—

"agreed with the decision . . . to recommend building on this land 100 houses. He has totally disregarded the SIX previous Inspectors' decisions. The Council, Parish Council and the people do not allow Building in this Green Valley. This will set a precedent of Building on Green Field sites in North Somerset. This also comes on the back of another Government Office Decision to Close the only major employer in Long Ashton . . . with the loss of 220 jobs."

It is a major blow for this village. When the Minister says that the inspector will submit a report and recommendations to the Secretary of State with whom the final decision will rest, we know that accountability lies with the Minister and her superiors.

Under this Government, a prosperous village is facing rising unemployment, the destruction of its green fields, the building of houses with no infrastructure, more cars, more pollution, more congestion and problems with road safety. The matter lies in the hands of the Secretary of State. The only conclusion that we can draw is that those who make the decisions do not know the area under consideration, the local circumstances or the problems that local people face. They do not understand the problems that people in Long Ashton face, but—perhaps most importantly—we believe that they do not care.

12.4 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on securing this Adjournment debate. I think it is important for hon. Members to come to the House to raise issues that concern their constituents, and I commend the hon. Gentleman for doing so.

I shall try to deal with the points that the hon. Gentleman raised, but I shall first reiterate for him the purpose of the planning system. It is fundamentally to try to reconcile and balance the interests of all those concerned with the development and use of land in an area. The system recognises that there are often strong conflicts of interest in the making of final decisions. It tries to operate openly and fairly both in controlling land use and in promoting sustainable development.

Of course, not everyone is always satisfied with the outcome of a particular decision on land use, and we have heard today, rightly, some of the hon. Gentleman's concerns about his local area. I assure him that the planning system operates to try to balance interests. It has never been the case that there is a right of veto on development in a particular area, and I am surprised by his comments about the inspectors. Their role is designed so that they are independent of all those strongly held interests precisely so that they can try to reach a balanced judgment in decisions that are often difficult. If the hon. Gentleman is querying the independence of the inspector's role, he is challenging a fundamental characteristic of the planning system.

Dr. Fox: I am not challenging the independence of inspectors per se. My specific question was why, if six earlier inquiries had come to the same conclusion that

development should not go ahead, the Secretary of State agreed that house building should occur in this case? What was different about this inspector's conclusions?

Ms Hughes: I heard the hon. Gentleman's contention that there had been six previous occasions on which different conclusions were drawn. If he knows the detailed, complex history of the various decisions and appeals relating to this site, he will know that his question is not straightforward. At least one decision by an inspector was overturned because throughout the inquiry he wrongly assumed that the land was greenbelt land. His decision was subsequently quashed by a court. The decision-making in this case has a tortuous history, and I shall go over that in a moment.

First, however, in the case of the Long Ashton appeal, I cannot comment on the merit of the specific planning decision because, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the Secretary of State has made his decision not to overturn the inspector's decision, and there follows a six-week period in which aggrieved parties can make application to the High Court. I cannot prejudice the position of the Secretary of State or any other party because we are still within that six-week period, which ends on 17 November.

I want to make general remarks about greenbelt policy, which was at the heart of the hon. Gentleman's criticism, because the debate is about greenbelt land at Long Ashton. It is very important first to stress that the land to which the hon. Gentleman referred does not have greenbelt status. However, before I say what status it has, which is germane to the issue, I want to restate our policy on green belts.

We remain firm in our commitment to green belts. I confirmed that in an Opposition day debate as recently as 2 November. Green belts are meant to remain open for as far ahead as we can reasonably foresee, and there should be a strong presumption against inappropriate development in them. That does not mean, however, that development cannot take place in green belts. It means that inappropriate development can take place only where very special circumstances exist, and we take that policy very seriously.

As I said, the Government remain committed to their policy on green belts, but it has always been open to local authorities, if they wish, to propose changes to greenbelt boundaries, and that has been attempted in relation to the land at Long Ashton on two occasions. However, such changes must be exceptional; they should take place only after rigorous examination of all the options. Furthermore, they should be open to full public consultation.

If it is proposed to add land to existing green belt—as has been twice attempted on the site referred to by the hon. Gentleman—it must form part of the development plan process. The onus is on the local authority to show that one of the five purposes of including land in green belts has been met. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, those purposes are to stop urban sprawl, to prevent neighbouring towns from merging, to help safeguard the countryside from encroachment, to preserve the setting and character of historic towns and to encourage the recycling of urban land.

There has been no change in that policy; it remains the same as that of the previous Administration in PPG2, published in 1995. However, not only is the piece of land that we are discussing not greenbelt land, it has yet another status. In the plan, it is earmarked as safeguarded or white land. White land is not covered by greenbelt status; it is land between the urban area and the green belt that may be required to meet longer-term development needs. The purpose of white land is to help safeguard the green belt—that is most important—by providing a reserve of land that could be built on in future, thus avoiding taking land out of the green belt. Safeguarded land does not mean that land so designated is being safeguarded for future addition to the green belt. Quite the contrary—safeguarded land can be built on in future so as to preserve adjacent greenbelt land. That is the status of that piece of land in the plan.

The Long Ashton site is not in the green belt; it was excluded in 1966. Although there have been two attempts since then to include the site in the green belt, both were quashed by the courts. When the hon. Gentleman says that decisions have been taken time after time to include the land in the green belt, that is not true.

The Woodspring local plan was put on deposit in 1995. That was the first attempt to include the land in the green belt. On behalf of the Secretary of State, the Government office of the south-west objected to that proposal, because the council had not shown the exceptional circumstances required to remove the land from its white land status into the green belt. At the public inquiry held to hear objections, the council accepted that it could not justify the change. The inquiry inspector—who is independent—concluded that there was no compelling case for a departure from national policy so as to include the land in the green belt.

As the hon. Gentleman will know, North Somerset council, the successor authority to Woodspring district council, decided not to accept the inspector's recommendation. The council's proposed modifications, published in June this year, did not allocate the site for housing—as the inspector had most recently recommended—and proposed extension of the green belt around the site. In its response to the inspector's report, the council again stated that it could not identify any exceptional circumstances to justify the proposed extension to the green belt. That is why the Government office of the south-west objected to the council's decision not to accept the inspector's recommendation; the office again pointed to the council's failure to identify exceptional circumstances.

The council is still considering its response to that objection. I understand that it is likely to publish further modifications to the plan in the near future, but I cannot speculate on that matter. As I do not know what the council will propose, I cannot say what the Secretary of State's response might be.

I have spoken at length about the history of the land at Long Ashton. I apologise to the House for that, because it is a complex matter. However, we need to understand that complex history in the light of the hon. Gentleman's contentions as to what is happening at Long Ashton. That history sets the context for the Secretary of State's view on the local plan, and explains the relationship between the site and the green belt. The site remains outside the green belt because there has been no change to the boundary. It still has the status of white land—a protection for the green belt as land on which development is always possible.

[Ms Hughes]

The Government are committed to protecting the green belt. We are committed to taking into account all the issues that the hon. Gentleman raises on housing, housing need, transport and infrastructure in considering development. That is firmly our policy.

As the hon. Gentleman said, he has written very recently to the Secretary of State, raising concerns about the draft planning guidance for the south-west. He raised points about the housing numbers that might be included in that.

I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman says that civil servants produce the figures to which he is objecting. The conference of planning authorities produced the original figures that will be considered by an independent panel in March. The Secretary of State will ultimately make a decision on those figures when he approves regional planning guidance. At the moment, the figures that he sees have nothing to do with civil servants. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not know more about the process. Draft regional planning guidance will be considered at a public examination in the spring, so I cannot comment further on it now.

The Government remain committed to the green belt as a means of protecting our countryside. We share the hon. Gentleman's concern about all the factors that need to be taken into account in considering development. Protection of the green belt remains as strong as ever. As I said last week, our record on that in the past two years has been much better than that of his Government over the previous 10 years, during which green belt was lost every year.

Although some commentators choose to emphasise development proposals that might threaten the green belt, as the hon. Gentleman has, the truth is that it is beginning to expand under this Government. Adopted green belts now cover 12 per cent. of England, which is more than double the figure some 20 years ago.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises the importance that we place on achieving sustainable development and making sensible decisions about housing development. Within that, we shall protect the green belt as far as we possibly can, consistent with the objectives of sustainable development and of meeting the wide variety of needs of people living and working in an area.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 November 1999

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Working Families Tax Credit

1. **Mr. Alan W. Williams** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What is the total number of inquiries to date on the telephone hotline for the working families tax credit; and what percentage of these have led to successful awards. [96990]

8. **Mr. Ian Stewart** (Eccles): What steps he is taking to increase public awareness of the working families tax credit. [96997]

9. **Liz Blackman** (Erewash): How many people have been identified to date as eligible for the working families tax credit who were not previously claiming family credit. [96998]

12. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the working families tax credit. [97001]

14. **Ms Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): What progress is being made towards the implementation of the working families tax credit. [97003]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Since the Prime Minister and I launched the publicity campaign, there have been 700,000 inquiries about the working families tax credit—the biggest ever response to a Government advertising campaign—and 250,000 new applications have been made. We believe that 800,000 children will be taken out of poverty as a result of that and other measures.

Mr. Williams: I congratulate the Chancellor, and I pay tribute to the Financial Secretary for her excellent work in publicising and increasing awareness of that excellent new benefit. It will give poorly paid families £10, £20 or £50 a week, and will be a great help in tackling child poverty.

However, might there be a more active role for the Inland Revenue in increasing awareness of the working families tax credit? Although we think of the Inland Revenue as being responsible for detecting tax evasion and maximising the tax take, does it have an equivalent obligation to advise people, especially low-paid workers, of their rights and entitlements?

Mr. Brown: The Inland Revenue will continue to publicise the new tax credits available to working families, but the best publicity for the benefit will be those working families who have been able to acquire it. Many of them are £50 a week better off as a result of what has happened. It is time for the Conservatives to tell us whether they will now drop their opposition to the working families tax credit and start supporting working families in this country.

Mr. Stewart: I welcome the measures taken by the Government to date, which were enhanced by the Chancellor's statement yesterday. My constituents in Pendlebury, Swinton, Eccles, Irlam and Cadishead will, as they say in Salford, be well chuffed. The working families tax credit will allow families with a full-time worker to achieve a guaranteed income of £200 a week, and to earn up to £235 before income tax kicks in. Does the Chancellor agree that the Opposition are very sad—indeed, quite mad sometimes—in saying that they will scrap that tax credit? Does that not show that they are extremely unelectable?

Mr. Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend. He represents a constituency in the north-west, and I can tell him that 210,000 families in the north-west are benefiting from the new working families tax credit. He is absolutely right to draw attention to the fact that if the Opposition abolished the working families tax credit, it would be a £24-a-week tax increase for some of our poorest working families. It is unfortunate that the Opposition have said that they will abolish it. Perhaps today the shadow Chancellor will answer the question—will he now drop his opposition to the working families tax credit?

Liz Blackman: Why has my right hon. Friend the Chancellor extended working families tax credit and the attendant child tax credit so far above family credit? Does he consider that over-generous?

I must tell him that those are not questions that are posed by families in my constituency, who welcome the additional resources that give them the security to bring up and care for their families. Apart from the general opposition to working families tax credit espoused by the Conservatives, why are they so particularly opposed to this extension? Does my right hon. Friend think that they have canvassed eligible families in their constituencies—or do they rely on getting their information from the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Brown: In my hon. Friend's region, 110,000 people are benefiting from the working families tax credit. She is absolutely right to draw attention to the fact that the working families tax credit is similar to the earned income tax credit in the United States. It was a policy that Ronald Reagan could support—even Milton Friedman supported it—but it is not supported by the Opposition.

Mr. Chapman: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that 1,200 families in my constituency will benefit from this boost to their income. However, many are still to apply. Will my right hon. Friend join me in

encouraging those people who have not yet applied to do so as quickly as possible, because that will mark their entitlement date for the credit?

Mr. Brown: We shall continue our campaign to advertise the benefits of the working families tax credit, which reduces the marginal tax rate for thousands of families in Britain and eliminates the poverty trap for many of them. Under the previous Government, there was sometimes a marginal tax rate of more than 100 per cent. for some of the lowest paid families in Britain. Working families throughout Britain will be sad to know that the Leader of the Opposition says that this is a tangible difference between Labour and Conservatives, and that a former Opposition social security spokesman says:

"We would cut the working families tax credit".—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 951.]

I again appeal to the Opposition: will they change their approach to the working families tax credit and to the minimum wage which underpins it?

Ms Perham: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, by contrast with the more than 1.5 million people in London who were unemployed at least once between 1992 and 1997, nearly 125,000 families in London will receive extra help from the working families tax credit? Since 1997, unemployment has fallen by 31 per cent. in my constituency of Ilford, North. The working families tax credit and the measures that my right hon. Friend announced on Tuesday, including the enhanced new deal for lone parents, will be welcomed in my constituency, especially by those working families who need to get off benefit and make work pay.

Mr. Brown: I should have thought that all parties in the House would want to support measures that, first, give a guaranteed minimum family income of £200 a week; secondly, are backed up by a minimum wage which is available to 2 million workers; thirdly, at the same time give additional help for child care to millions of working parents in Britain now eligible for it; and fourthly, raise child benefit by 30 per cent., something that, unfortunately, the Conservative Government were unable to do—they froze it for two years. Again, the Conservative party must answer this question: will they help working families in Britain or hurt them by abolishing the minimum wage, the working families tax credit and child benefit tax increases?

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Does the working families tax credit give help to families rearing their families at home? If there is a preference for institutionalised child care, can the right hon. Gentleman explain why?

Mr. Brown: The working families tax credit is a help for people bringing up children at home. If, for example, a mother wants to be off work with a child, whether for months or years, the household's income is protected by the working families tax credit. The Conservatives fail to understand that this is a benefit that helps lone parents get to work, and helps working families make decisions and gives them choices. It is about time that the hon. Gentleman, who has a reputation for being a bit more compassionate than today's Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen, started to support the working families tax credit instead of opposing it.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Is the Chancellor aware that the Federation of Small Businesses has described the working families tax credit as yet another administrative burden on small business owners, and that the Institute of Directors has protested that it is not the job of business to run the welfare system for the Government? Why have the Government designed the welfare tax credit system in a bureaucratic way that creates such a burden for British business?

Mr. Brown: The working families tax credit rewards work and is a good measure for business. It is about time that Conservative Members recognised that they left millions of people in poverty in Britain. They now say that they would do absolutely nothing about it. They would abolish the measures that we have taken, even those supported by right and left in the United States and elsewhere. It is about time that the Conservative party woke up.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Without blaming the Conservative party, will the Chancellor say what the cost of the working families tax credit is to business?

Mr. Brown: The cost of the working families tax credit depends on the business and the numbers, but it is a general benefit to business. Businesses can now tell their employees the benefits for work and for child care. It is about time that the Conservative party saw the benefits not only to families but to business.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I hardly dare hope that we get a straight answer to a straight question. Will the Chancellor confirm that the cost to business of the working families tax credit is about £100 million a year? Does he agree with Chantrey Vellacott that that is just a part of the £5.2 billion a year of extra cost on business? What will he say to Mr. Nigel Fielding, who says in today's *Daily Mail*:

"I don't mind doing civil servants' work for them if I'm paid for my time and effort. But no such luck"?

Mr. Brown: The answer is no. The working families tax credit is a benefit to business. I do not think that the Conservative party understands that if wages are higher, if there is a reward to work as a result of the credit and if child care is available for mothers and for companies where those mothers work, that will benefit employment and industry. I repeat: a measure that can be supported by Ronald Reagan and Milton Friedman, but is too extreme for the Conservative party, says something about that party.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it true that someone who has four jobs does not qualify for the working families tax credit? If it is, there lies the answer to why the shadow Chancellor will not support it—he has four jobs.

Mr. Brown: I do not know why the shadow Chancellor does not have time to do the research for Question Time and for other matters, but I will leave that to further debates in the House.

Euro

2. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): What assessment he has made of the effect on his policy of Bank of England independence of entry to the eurozone. [96991]

7. **Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): What assessment he has made of the impact of his policy of independence of the Bank of England. [96996]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The new monetary policy framework is already yielding significant benefits: inflation is low and close to target. The Government's reforms have helped to create a sound and credible platform of economic stability.

As the Chancellor has repeatedly stated, a decision to join economic and monetary union would be taken only if the economic benefits to the United Kingdom from joining were clear and unambiguous.

Mr. Bercow: I warmly congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment.

Given that the European interest rate is set by the European Central Bank, whose governing council comprises three Germans, two Dutchmen, two Finns, two Frenchmen, two Italians, two Spaniards, a Belgian, an Irishman, a Luxemburger and a Portuguese, and that Governments are prohibited from seeking to influence that rate, why does not the Chief Secretary have the guts to admit that, within the euro, the Bank of England would be merely an administrative jobsworth and that crucial decisions affecting this country would henceforward be taken by people whom we do not elect, whom we cannot remove and whom it would be illegal to seek to persuade of our view?

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks and, indeed, for trailing me to Treasury questions from Education and Employment questions, where we had so many enjoyable exchanges.

The House will have got the hon. Gentleman's message that he is opposed to the euro in every shape and form. What is equally clear is that there are two routes to stability. Of course, were we to join the euro, the Bank of England would have to be brought into conformity with the treaties, but there are two routes to stability: the independent Bank of England that we have established, or a European Central Bank arrangement. There is no route to stability on offer from the Conservative party, under which we would be back to boom and bust.

Mr. Khabra: I thank the Chancellor and welcome the pre-Budget report that he announced to the House the day before yesterday. As a result of his economic competence, we have a sound and credible economic policy, economic stability and steady growth; during the 1980s, the Conservatives had a policy of bust and boom. Interest rates have peaked at 7.5 per cent., half the peak interest rate in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the shadow Chancellor is as incompetent today as his party was in government?

Mr. Smith: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for his question. As a result of the policies for stability to which he draws attention, this country has 700,000 more people in work now than when the lot opposite left office. Moreover, whereas the previous Government left us a deficit in the public finances of £28 billion and doubled the country's indebtedness, we have balanced the public finances while improving public services and helping pensioners and hard-working families. My hon. Friend is right: any return to the Conservative party's policies would be a return to the deprivation, division, unemployment and instability that disfigured this country in the past.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): Would the Chief Secretary admit that achieving the economic tests that the Chancellor has set for entry into the euro will require careful management—they will not suddenly be achieved by magic? Is he aware of the criticism that the Chancellor's statements do not do enough to show how the fiscal balance could be managed so as to take pressure off interest rates and allow the Monetary Policy Committee to think in terms of setting interest rates that converge with the much lower interest rates on the continent, enabling us to have at least the prospect of joining the euro in the near future?

Mr. Smith: Fiscal and monetary policy sticks to the sensible rules that we have laid down to maintain stability and steady growth. I welcome a question from a Conservative Member who takes a more balanced view on these issues. Of course, the tests will have to be carefully measured. We have said what those tests are, and as we have said all along, we shall make that assessment early in the next Parliament.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Does it not seem that the differences within the Monetary Policy Committee are between the committee's external and internal members on interest rates? Might not the external members have a better understanding of the level of interest rates required, because they come from the competitive sector of our economy and therefore have a better understanding of that sector, which my right hon. Friend has done so much to stimulate?

Mr. Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend. One of the strong advantages of the Monetary Policy Committee is that a combination of voices with different experience makes that important judgment. Ultimately, however, we judge the Bank of England's operational independence and the Monetary Policy Committee's decisions on what they deliver. What they have delivered is low and stable inflation, which has hit the target that they have been set.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Are we closer to, or further from, meeting the euro convergence conditions than when the policy was first announced?

Mr. Smith: As I said, we shall make the assessment early in the next Parliament. We are not giving a running commentary on this. The British economy is, beyond doubt, immeasurably stronger as a result of the measures that we have put in place for fiscal stability, investment and helping people into jobs.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): One of the Government's earliest commitments was to a stable and

competitive exchange rate. Does the Minister think that we currently have a competitive exchange rate? If not, what is the role of the Bank of England in securing one?

Mr. Smith: The role of the Bank of England and the Monetary Policy Committee is clear: it is to hit the inflation target. It is by sustaining low inflation that we make the best contribution to economic success and stability for the future—including the effects on the exchange rate.

Directors' Salaries

3. **Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): What further discussions he has had with employers over income increases to heads of companies. [96992]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): At the recent Confederation of British Industry conference, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor warned of the danger that unacceptably high pay rises would lead to higher interest rates. In the case of company executives, it is the responsibility of shareholders and remuneration committees to ensure that pay is justified by performance.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not a fact that many senior directors and executives—many of whom are already on large salaries—have recently given themselves very large pay increases, share options, bonuses and the rest that are very different from the level of salary increases given to the large majority of their employees? In view of that fact, and recognising what my hon. Friend said about the Chancellor's warning, has not the time come for Government action on the matter?

Mr. Timms: There is evidence of pay running at a high level for some senior positions in some of our firms, and responsibility in pay rises is of the greatest importance. Although pay responsibility is important in the public sector, it is just as important in the private sector. Such responsibility is important on the shop floor, but it is just as important in the boardroom. Responsible pay settlements are essential to achieve the high and stable growth and employment levels to which all of our economic policies are directed.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that it is not only company heads who are paying the top tax rate, but hundreds of thousands of public sector workers are also paying at 40 per cent? Does he agree that 26,000 NHS workers, 9,000 policemen and 28,000 teachers pay at 40 per cent? What are the Government doing, not to have a go at those workers as fat cats, but to relieve their tax burden?

Mr. Timms: We have maintained all our commitments on tax rates. Now, however, the key issue is that, for the first time that most of us can remember, we have a real prospect of full employment in Britain. Most people thought that full employment was only for the history books, but the success of our policies in the past two and a half years has led to a new stability, so that full employment is now a realistic prospect. We have to be vigilant against anything that puts that prize at risk—which means guarding against, among other things, irresponsible pay rises.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): Based on August figures, wage increases are running at 4.9 per cent. Is that level of earnings growth posing a threat to inflation?

Mr. Timms: The August figures are up 0.3 per cent. on the figure for three months earlier, but the figures are erratic. In the longer term, the figures are still relatively low. The last peak in earnings growth, in 1990—when unemployment was much greater, at 1.6 million—was 10 per cent. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend is right to say that there is no room for complacency: everyone needs to be responsible on pay.

Poverty Alleviation

4. **Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): What plans he has to include measures relating to the alleviation of poverty in his pre-Budget statement. [96993]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): In the pre-Budget report, I set out the long-term ambition for the next decade to halve child poverty as a step on the way to abolishing it within a generation. Building on measures in the last two Budgets that will lift 800,000 children out of poverty, I also announced that we shall consult on a new children's fund to provide project grants for community action to tackle all aspects of child poverty.

The pre-Budget report also announced measures to tackle unemployment and pensioner poverty. The winter allowance for every pensioner household will be £100 for the rest of this Parliament; there will be free television licences for pensioners who are over 75; and because our intention is to tackle pensioner poverty, we shall uprate the minimum income guarantee for pensioners in line with earnings for the rest of this Parliament. Consequently, by April 2000, the oldest pensioners will be £10.35 per week better off than when we came to power, and the pensioner couple will be £15.90 better off.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am very grateful to the Chancellor for that answer. However, has he had a chance yet to consider the results published in the British household below-average income study, which examined work that had been done, between 1991 and 1997, by the British household panel study? Does he agree that the panel's study showed that—for that entire seven-year period—9 per cent. of the sample of households studied stayed below 30 per cent. of income distribution? With a potential Department of Social Security underspend of £7 billion, and a current balance of £12 billion in the national insurance fund, does the Minister really believe that a 1.1 per cent. uprating of long-term social security benefits is adequate for families who really cannot find work?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman—who is Chairman of the Social Security Committee—is an expert on many of those matters, but he is painting an incomplete picture.

First, benefits for the disabled are rising by £1 billion. Secondly, benefits for children are rising by £6 billion annually by the end of the Parliament. Thirdly, we have just announced measures ensuring that benefits for pensioners are rising by £3 billion annually. It is, therefore, simply not correct to state that benefits for those groups who are most in poverty are rising only by the rate of inflation: we are taking additional measures for every group. It is about time that the Liberal party, which in its general election manifesto promised far less—indeed, a fraction—of what we have done, started to support us.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North–West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on the excellence of his pre-Budget statement, in all the respects that we are discussing. In particular, I welcome his announcement of an important initiative enabling gifts of quoted shares and securities to be made to charitable bodies. During the consultation in which the regulations and legislation involved will be decided, will he make it clear to his colleagues—and, of course, to Inland Revenue officials—that they should bring to the negotiations the positive and flexible spirit that was embodied in his important pre-Budget statement?

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend. He is, in fact, saying that the House should unite in tackling child poverty. The children's fund that we have announced will allow voluntary, community and charitable groups to be involved in innovative projects tackling all its aspects. As part of that, we are changing the charity tax laws to make it easier for people—through either payroll giving or direct giving—to donate more to charities, voluntary organisations and other bodies. I would have expected support for those measures throughout the House, but is it not typical of the Conservatives that they cannot support action against child poverty?

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): How many new pensioner couples will be hit by the abolition of the married couples allowance by the end of this Parliament? Did the Chancellor fail to tell the Prime Minister about that yesterday, or did he simply forget? Why did he not mention it in his pre-Budget statement?

Mr. Brown: It is this Government who, for pensioners—

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Answer the question.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman asks me to answer the question, and then does not give me a chance to do so. Is that not typical of the Conservatives? They have learned nothing in two and a half years of opposition. Do they not understand that they lost the election because they never listen to the country?

First, we have taken more pensioners out of tax. Secondly, we have reduced the savings tax rate to 10p: I would expect the Conservative party to support that. Thirdly, we have reduced the basic rate of income tax from 23p to 22p, in order to help all pensioners. Finally—*[Interruption.]* I will tell Conservative Members this, if they will listen. Finally, all pensioners who are currently on the married couples allowance will retain it.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, when he took office, there were 4.4 million children in poverty in Britain? His promise to take 800,000 children out of poverty will still meet only a fifth of the huge challenge that we were elected to meet. He has already committed £1,080 each to the poorest families, but can he assure me that his change to children's tax credit will ensure that women—the main carers for children—will have the necessary resources in their purses, so that the money can benefit children directly?

Mr. Brown: That is exactly the proposal that we are presenting for consultation. I hope that many people will become involved in the pre-Budget discussions about how we can make progress in providing benefits for all children.

Our proposals for tackling poverty have four separate strands. First, there are the increased benefits that will help families: child benefit, the working families tax credit, the 10p starting rate of income tax and changes in national insurance will all benefit the poorest working families. Secondly, our proposals include the provision of more resources for nursery and pre-school education, and for school education. Thirdly, there is the sure start programme, which will provide about £1,000 per child in the poorest parts of the country in order to create new opportunities in health care and education. Fourthly, we are expanding our programme relating to the innovative children's fund. I believe that that will involve a partnership between Government, communities and voluntary organisations, and a national crusade to tackle and eliminate child poverty.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): The Chancellor will understand that the next comprehensive spending review will be crucial for those interested in tackling poverty. Will he clarify a question that I asked when he gave his pre-Budget statement? Does the fact that the new review has been brought forward a year mean that the current 2001-02 spending plans may be changed, as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) hopes, or is the Chief Secretary to the Treasury right to say that those plans are set in stone?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking that question again. We have not changed our position on the comprehensive spending review. The hon. Gentleman suggests that it has been brought forward. It will be at the time that we said and will be happening over the next few months. The Liberals must wake up to the situation in this country. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot keep saying that they are going to be tough on public spending and yet demand more money at every turn. Let me remind the House what a Liberal spokesman said last week:

> "There are a lot of things our party wants to promise, but we have to be realistic about what we can deliver if we want to be seen as fit for government. For example, it would be great to abolish television licence fees for pensioners, but it would cost hundreds of millions and voters would not like it."

Is it not about time that the Liberals supported the good things that we are doing?

Prosperity

5. **Mr. Christopher Leslie** (Shipley): What steps he is taking to ensure that all sections of society share in increasing economic prosperity. [96994]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Government are committed to a fair and inclusive society in which everyone can contribute to and benefit from economic prosperity. The Chancellor set out the Government's strategy in the pre-Budget report, published on Tuesday. We want to create employment opportunity for everyone of working age, ensure that children have the best possible start in life and deliver a better deal for pensioners.

Mr. Leslie: Have not 18 years of Conservative failure made pensioners some of the poorest in society? Is my hon. Friend aware that pensioners' poverty takes its toll particularly in the colder winter months, and has done for far too long? Will she take this opportunity to make it crystal clear that the welcome new £100 winter allowance is not a computer error, a mistake or even a one-off, but a bonus delivered only by a Labour Government?

Miss Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. Of course, there is no computer error on the £100 winter allowance. We are delighted to be able to say that it will go to more than 7 million eligible pensioner households this year and—as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced on Tuesday—every year hereafter. Under this Government, pensioner households are on average £300 a year better off. In addition to the free television licence, from which more than 3 million pensioner households will benefit, another 1.5 million pensioner households will benefit from the extension of the 10p rate to savings income, which was also announced on Tuesday.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I welcome the hon. Lady to her new responsibilities. Why do the Government persist in their nasty and mean-spirited attack on pensioners who happen to have saved all their lives? Those who have a few hundred pounds of investment income can no longer reclaim the tax on their dividends. Is she proud to be punishing savers in that way?

Miss Johnson: We are helping pensioner households across the board. We are also helping those who are paying tax. Pensioners were already paying less tax under this Labour Government than ever before, even without Tuesday's announcement on the 10p savings rate, which will be of particular help to many pensioner households. The hon. Gentleman seems to fail to recognise that two thirds of pensioner households pay no tax.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the work of the Northamptonshire Association of Asian, African and Caribbean Businesses and welcome the many measures in the pre-Budget statement that promote enterprise and encourage people to set up small businesses? Will she ensure that steps are taken to encourage organisations that support businesses in ethnic minority communities so that they too can benefit from economic prosperity?

Miss Johnson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments and her detailed knowledge of the work being done in her constituency to support enterprise. The Government support such work throughout the country. We want to achieve our economic ambitions for the next decade. They include closing the productivity gap and ensuring that enterprise is open to all. As part of that, we are providing a new £30 million package to promote enterprise in disadvantaged communities, providing better access to finance, better advice and mentoring and demonstrating that our commitment is borne out by practical steps.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I welcome the Economic Secretary to her new post and wish her well in it. I remind her that before the Government share out economic prosperity, they must ensure that it continues to increase. Does she agree that

"Productivity is a fundamental yardstick of economic performance . . . poor productivity condemns a nation to be held back"?

That is what the Chancellor said in his pre-Budget statement document last year. Was she surprised to hear him admit on Tuesday that, since he became Chancellor, productivity growth has fallen by two thirds? Does she call that making Britain more competitive?

Miss Johnson: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for welcoming me to my new post. However, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor certainly did not make that admission. We are taking steps to address exactly the issues that the right hon. Gentleman is raising. The two worst recessions since 1945 occurred when the Conservatives were in government. They doubled the national debt and presided over interest rates of 15 per cent. In addition, there were 22 Tory tax rises. None of that did very much for productivity, growth or enterprise.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Lady may not have had a chance to read it, but the admission is in a document published by the Chancellor on Tuesday. It shows productivity and growth falling—she should take a look at it.

If the Government honestly want to increase prosperity, why did they raise tax by £40 billion—by £30 billion on business alone—and give Britain the fastest rising tax burden in Europe? Does the hon. Lady remember when she was a candidate in the general election the Prime Minister saying that Labour

"had no plans to increase tax at all"?

Why are the Government still piling on regulations costing business £5 billion a year? What does the hon. Lady have to say to the president of north-east chambers of commerce, in the Prime Minister's own area, who said that

"bureaucracy . . . is stifling business competitiveness"?

Is that not why the president of the Confederation of British Industry said that the sums that the Government

"give back are trivial by comparison"?

Did not the Chancellor inherit the fastest growing economy in Europe and are they not squandering that inheritance?

Miss Johnson: We inherited a deficit of £28 billion in public finances. We inherited a boom and bust economy with no possibility for businesses or individuals to plan ahead because of its instability. We have turned that around; we now have stability. The right hon. Gentleman will not even tell us whether he supports one of the key measures to ensure that we have that stability in the British economy—the independence of the Bank of England.

Working Families Tax Credit

6. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): What estimate he has made of the number of families in the north-west region who will be eligible for working families tax credit. [96995]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): It is estimated that 250,000 families could receive the working families tax credit in the Government north-west administrative region.

Mr. Miller: Contrary to the rant of the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), something must be right because, since this Government have been in power, unemployment in my constituency has fallen by 34 per cent. It is important that we bring together all agencies that can help promote the working families tax credit and make it work. I commend to my hon. Friend an exercise that I conducted in co-operation with the private sector—Warner cinemas and THI Developments especially—local authorities, the Benefits Agency, and so on, to help to promote the creation of jobs under the new deal and, indeed, outside it. Perhaps similar exercises in co-operation may help to create more jobs.

Dawn Primarolo: I agree with my hon. Friend that co-ordination is necessary to ensure that people understand that the working families tax credit tackles the traps of unemployment and poverty, and, most importantly, helps parents with children who want to work with their child care expenses. The shadow Chancellor must explain to, for instance, the young woman whom I met last week, who will be £109 a week better off as a result of the working families tax credit—1.5 million families will benefit—why he would take that money away from her and put up her taxes.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I hope that the Minister agrees that one way of helping those on the working families tax credit in the north-west is to ensure a strong export performance in industries such as aerospace in my constituency? To that end, I seek her assurance that the Treasury has no plans to change the present way in which it supports and funds the operation of the Export Credits Guarantee Department—

Madam Speaker: Order. That does not relate to the question on the Order Paper. The right hon. Member is a long-standing member of the House, and should not try to do things like that.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is not the working families tax credit, together with the national minimum wage, a tremendous help in areas such as Burnley, in the north-west, where we have traditionally suffered low pay and deprivation? Is not it important help not only to the families affected but to the entire economy in such areas?

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend is right to draw together the national minimum wage and the working families tax credit as underpinning employment. They are good for both the employee, whose wages make work worthwhile, and employers, in ensuring retention and recruitment of the work force, and especially assisting them, through the provision of child care tax credits, to retain the skills of women who would otherwise be forced out of the labour market for a long period when they have young children.

Climate Change Levy

10. **Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): What assessment his Department has made of the impact on chemical industries of the proposed climate change levy. [96999]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): We have studied the impact very carefully. Together with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister for the Environment, I recently met representatives of all the energy-intensive industries including the Chemical Industries Association Ltd. Last week, I had a useful discussion with members of the all-party parliamentary chemical industry group.

The chemical industry will have the opportunity to benefit from the 80 per cent. discount for energy-intensive sectors that sign energy-efficiency agreements with the Government, and from exemptions for electricity for good quality combined heat and power plant, which is widely used in the chemical sector.

Mrs. Winterton: I welcome the fact that the climate change levy will not be as punitive, as announced in Tuesday's statement, although it should be noted that there will be an annual increase of £1 billion a year, starting next year. What other measures do Treasury Ministers envisage taking to assist the competitiveness of the chemical industry as the UK's top manufacturing export earner?

Mr. Timms: All the £1 billion will be refunded through the reduction in employer national insurance contributions.

I do not know whether any of the hon. Lady's constituents work for ICI Chlor-Chemicals—I suspect that they may.

Today, my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) has been talking to the chief executive there who said that he was encouraged by the way in which the Government have responded to his company's concerns about competitiveness. He said that the Government had clearly listened and made a significant and intelligent response. Those views will be widely shared by people in the chemicals industry and hon. Members who represent constituencies with substantial employment in chemicals, like that of the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). The two aims for the climate change levy are to maximise environmental benefit and not to pose a threat to the competitiveness of UK firms. We have made progress on both this week with the announcements of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer: there will be substantially greater environmental benefits, which have been welcomed by environmental organisations, and we have taken steps to protect competitiveness in the chemical sector and other industries.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I welcome the exemption of renewables from the climate change levy announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-Budget statement. What appraisal has my hon. Friend made of the effect on growth and competitiveness of the United Kingdom renewables industry that the exemption will produce?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The renewable energy industry is important and the UK has considerable strength there already. The combined heat and power industry is also important and we have some leading technologies in that area, too. Both industries will benefit from the exemptions that my right hon. Friend announced this week, so that is good for British business and technology.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will the Minister confirm that despite the Government's climb-down on the energy tax on Tuesday, major sectors of industry will continue to pay in net amounts of tens of millions of pounds which their overseas competitors will be exempt from? Has he seen that, as well as the chemical industry, the Steel Association said yesterday that the tax

"will still result in more steel being produced overseas, often by producers using less environmentally friendly plant than those in the United Kingdom"?

According to that association, the tax is bad for industry, jobs and the global environment. Will Ministers stop mouthing slogans about competitiveness, fairness and enterprise, and start listening to those who work in industry and can deliver all the necessary reductions in these damaging gases, and so meet our international obligations without exporting British jobs, as the energy tax will do?

Mr. Timms: No, the energy tax will certainly not do that. First, there is no climb-down because the new package will have substantially greater environmental benefits than the package that was outlined earlier in the year. We said in the Budget that the levy would save 1.5 million tonnes of carbon emissions a year by 2010. Under the new proposals that figure will rise to at least 2 million tonnes, and the negotiated agreements could easily provide the same amount again. The steel industry is a big winner from this week's announcements. It will benefit from the 80 per cent. discount for sectors that reach energy efficient agreements with the Government. There is one being dealt with in the steel sector. It will also benefit from the exemptions for feedstocks—fuel used as feedstock.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Is not the climate change levy to be welcomed, saving 2 million tonnes of carbon each year? Has my hon. Friend heard anything from the other side of the House that would meet these commitments to the environment and be just as warmly welcomed by environmental groups as my hon. Friend's proposal is today?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The climate change levy is a big winner for Britain in terms of the environment and our industry. We have always said that protecting the environment goes hand in hand with building the economy. It must be good to tackle pollution—to work to reduce emissions. Surely even Conservative Members support that aim. We are delivering it.

11. **Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): What estimate he has made of the net financial gain to Government Departments as a result of the introduction of the climate change levy. [97000]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): Education, health and other public services will gain, along with the majority of firms, from a reduction in employers' national insurance contributions that will exceed their payments under the climate change levy. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made it clear in his statement on Tuesday, however, that the net gain to public services will be wholly offset by the additional support he has announced for energy efficiency measures in the private sector. There will therefore be no net financial gain to the public finances from the introduction of the levy.

Mr. Atkinson: The people who will lose, of course, are the unemployed in the north-east of England, because it is estimated that foreign inward investors will be put off by that billion pound energy tax. What assessment has the Financial Secretary made of the damage that will be caused to inward investment by the imposition of that new tax?

Mr. Timms: We have protected the competitiveness of UK firms and we have made big progress with the announcements that have been made this week. We want to provide additional incentives at the margin in every sector to reduce emissions, because everybody has a role to play in meeting our legally binding targets, which also have to be met by other countries in the same way. That is the right thing to do, because we all want to cut down on pollution and that is the effect that the levy will have.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): With last year's pre-Budget report, Lord Marshall's report, the Customs and Excise consultation and the wide consultation meetings held by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, does he agree that vast consultation has taken place about the design of the levy before it was introduced? My right

hon. Friend the Chancellor promised when he was appointed that our financial affairs would be managed with openness, good practice and transparency, and does my hon. Friend agree that the levy is a good example of his promise being kept?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is right and the process that we have followed is a model for how such things should be done. We had Lord Marshall's report, the initial announcements in March, the following consultation, and the announcements this week. Of course, the levy itself will only be introduced a year from next April. That is in contrast to the imposition of VAT on fuel under the previous Government.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): What is the gain to this country of closing large sectors of the horticultural industry and flying in cut flowers on jumbo jets that do not pay duty on fuel?

Mr. Timms: The horticultural industry will also gain from what has been announced this week. It is a big user of combined heat and power plants and it will therefore benefit substantially from what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has announced.

International Monetary Fund

13. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What representations he has made concerning the composition of the board of the IMF. [97002]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Government have not made any representations concerning the composition of the board of the IMF.

Barbara Follett: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and welcome her to her new post. Is she aware that in September the IMF replaced its much maligned enhanced structural adjustment facility, which one non-governmental organisation described as treatment by asphyxiation, with its new poverty reduction and growth programme? Will she and her ministerial colleagues do all that they can to ensure that that is not only a name change, but that poverty reduction is central in future IMF interventions in developing countries?

Miss Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her work in that area as a member of the Select Committee on International Development. I know how seriously she takes those issues and that she will appreciate how seriously my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the Treasury team take them, too. The poverty reduction and growth facility replacement programmes for the IMF enhanced structural adjustment facility will bring about a big improvement in the work that can be done and will ensure that the IMF and the World Bank work together more closely. It will also emphasise country ownership and focus much more strongly on poverty, with the aim of achieving poverty eradication goals that are set in the international development targets. I know that that will be most welcome.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Will the Economic Secretary try to get the Chancellor to explain how it came about that, within hours of his election as chairman of its key committee, the IMF announced that it would after all not be selling any of its gold through the market?

Does the Chancellor remember that whenever I suggested to him earlier in the year that it was not a good way of helping poor countries for the IMF to sell its gold through the market, he got rather cross with me and denounced me for not being genuinely interested in helping them? What was it that led him eventually to conclude that I had been right and that he had been wrong?

Miss Johnson: I do not know what led the hon. Gentleman to come to that remarkable conclusion. I am disappointed, in that he ought to be congratulating my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on the key role that he will be playing in those arenas as a result of taking over the committee. He ought also to be complimenting the Government on the relationship between the sale of gold and our ability to deal with poverty-stricken countries and the highly indebted poor countries issue. We have made massive progress, and the gold sales have contributed to that. Congratulations are due when real achievements are made by the Government in key areas.

Points of Order

12.31 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, at column 1122 of *Hansard*, the Prime Minister said that Britain must choose between taking France to court for its illegal ban on British beef and trying to persuade France to lift it. As the Government's attempts at persuasion have now collapsed in utter failure, and as, even in the last hour, British officials have been summoned to Brussels—no doubt to prepare for yet more unjustified concessions—can you tell the House whether the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has requested permission to make a statement about this devastating blow to his whole strategy?

Madam Speaker: I have had no request from the Minister to make a statement today.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that you will have noticed early-day motion 1007, condemning the Chancellor for the serious error that he made when addressing the House on Tuesday. Have you had any request from the Chancellor to make a personal statement so that he can correct what is a serious, but no doubt inadvertent, error?

Madam Speaker: I have seen the early-day motion to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, but I have not been told by the Chancellor that he is seeking to make a statement.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It was widely trailed on the wireless this morning that the Home Secretary would today be making clear his intentions with respect to legislation on the future of hunting. Have you had any notice from the Home Secretary that he is seeking to make a statement? If you have not, is it within your competence to detail the runner on the Treasury Bench to fetch the Home Secretary, since we have so much time between now and seven o'clock?

Madam Speaker: I am afraid that I do not have the authority to order a Minister to come here, and I am not aware that any such statement is being made.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As a defender of the rights of all Members of this House, you will recall that there was a vote in November 1997 in which 411 Members of this House expressed the opinion that foxhunting is animal abuse and should be banned. Can we have an assurance that, in the next Session of Parliament, you will ensure that there is a full debate, so that all hon. Members can express that view again?

Madam Speaker: We are now getting into bogus points of order, and there will be no more.

Business of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, at this day's sitting,

1. the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Messages from the Lords shall have been received; and

2. if the House has completed its consideration of any Messages received from the Lords and the Lords have adjourned their sitting, the Speaker shall adjourn the House without Question put.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

12.34 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): The motion is important because it sets out the relationship between another place and this House on a crucial but rather sad day, which may be the last of the Session—that remains to be seen. The motion refers to "Messages from the Lords" and to the fact that you, Madam Speaker, may adjourn the House. Before you can make that decision, you must consider the possibility that other matters may intervene. To follow on from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) a moment ago, you may be approached before the House adjourns by Ministers who want to make a statement. Beef on the bone and beef imports to France are subjects about which a Minister might want to make a statement and clarify the Government's position.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that foxhunting might also merit a statement at this point in the week? Does he agree that the Home Secretary might have cried off until now because such a statement would prove controversial for one side or the other?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right. Madam Speaker may wish to postpone the Adjournment of the House, which is the subject of the motion, to give the Home Secretary time to prepare a statement on foxhunting. The statement has been widely trailed but, so far, we have had no opportunity to hear it. Therefore, it would be appropriate to postpone the Adjournment of the House to give the Home Secretary time to clarify the Government's position.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Madam Speaker might receive a request from the Chancellor to deal with the disgraceful error to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) referred, or a request from the Prime Minister to apologise for his appalling abuse of Question Time yesterday, when he behaved like a bad vaudeville ham actor?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend puts those points so much better than I could. I propose to deal with that subject later, strictly in the context of the Adjournment of the House, which is the subject of the motion.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North–West Cambridgeshire): After my right hon. Friend has fully dealt with the good interventions of my hon. Friends, will he return to the possibility of a statement, before the Adjournment of the House, on the French attitude to beef? Does he agree that the House may also wish to hear a statement about the

Government's view on the German attitude to beef, and the likelihood that, after the French have agreed to accept British beef, the Germans will continue to hold out? Ministers should make a statement on the steps that they are taking about Germany.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that point. It is not too late for the House to deal with those matters. Today is a sitting day. The House must make a judgment, in the context of the motion, on whether it is appropriate to adjourn earlier or later, given the sort of developments that my right hon. Friend mentioned.

Hon. Members might believe that it is appropriate to consider other matters today. I have a few modest suggestions.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) *rose—*

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I shall give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown).

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when considering the motion, Madam Speaker may wish to take into account the written question from the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster):

"To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans in respect of hunting with dogs."

Would it not be a disgrace and an abuse of the House if we obtained a written answer tomorrow, after the House had prorogued? It is such a controversial matter that Madam Speaker might have expected a message from the Home Secretary to say that he would make a personal statement before the House prorogues today.

Mr. Forth: Those are the judgments that the House and Madam Speaker will have to make today. I cannot conceive that, with Madam Speaker's guidance, we could make the tragic mistake of adjourning unnecessarily early, and thus deny an opportunity for such statements to be made. It would surely be a tragic mistake if, at this stage of the Session, we were to adjourn without having given Ministers a proper opportunity to come to the House to clarify these matters and one or two others that I want to refer to. What would people think of us then? The House of Commons has all the opportunities in the world today—and perhaps tomorrow; who knows?—to give these matters proper consideration and to allow the Government to clarify their position, to the benefit of everybody, including the House. If we were to deny the Government and the House those opportunities, we would not be readily forgiven.

That is a serious matter, and one to which we must give consideration, but I want to return for a moment to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney). At Scottish questions the other day, I asked a question—which I thought was rather a good one, if I may say so—about a Minister's judgment on what would be more damaging to health: the consumption of beef on the bone or the consumption of beef produced from a food chain originating with human sewage. I thought that that was a perfectly reasonable question.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Are scripts being given out in the House? Might it be possible for all Members of the House to have them?

Madam Speaker: If papers are being passed around the House, that is not a matter for me.

Mr. Forth: I do not operate from scripts, as you well know, Madam Speaker. The only script that I have is a few handwritten notes to guide me and to ensure that I stay in order in terms of the motion before us.

As the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) has raised the point, it has been drawn to my attention that a written question on foxhunting, tabled by the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) to the Home Secretary, which has just been handed to me, is being answered today. The Home Secretary says:

"I am announcing today how the Government wish to proceed on this issue."

That is exactly the point that my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West was making. The Home Secretary normally prides himself on openness and, if I remember rightly, he is responsible for the Freedom of Information Bill, but the very man who will introduce that Bill to the House is trying to sneak out a grubby little statement in a written answer. He is not here today, although he has every opportunity to be so. If ever there were a good example of the need for the House to give him an opportunity to clarify the position, surely this is it.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a sad day? His remarks and what is going on in the other place make it clear that the Government are savaging one Chamber and completely ignoring the other.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because I wanted to come on to today's proceedings in the other place, which have direct relevance to the relationship between the other place and the House—do they not? In the context of what the House did yesterday—to the House of Lords Bill in particular—and their Lordships' deliberations on that Bill today, we have to make our own judgment about

"any Messages from the Lords",

to which the motion refers, and whether to adjourn the House. We must give some thought to the possibilities that exist of their Lordships making further amendments to the Bill. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. May I have one of the papers that are being passed around the Chamber?

Mr. Forth: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend think that the House ought to be suspended while the Labour party hands out its own scripts?

Mr. Forth: It seems—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you confirm that it would be

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

in order for a Home Office Minister—whether the Home Secretary or not—to apply to you to make a statement if he chose to do so?

Madam Speaker: If any Minister wishes to make a statement, he simply lets me know. In this case, the statement is being made by means of a written answer, and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, according to our procedures, that is perfectly in order.

Mr. Forth: Of course that is in order, as you, Madam Speaker, have just ruled. However, the House will be very conscious of the fact that, by using a written answer to reply to a question that Labour Members think is important and by not asking your permission to make a statement to the House, the Home Secretary has denied the House the opportunity to question him on what lies behind his answer. I am afraid that that is all too typical of the attitude that Ministers, including the Home Secretary, have repeatedly shown. I presume that the Home Secretary has something to hide, and I suspect that he has as much to hide from his own colleagues as from Conservative Members because he has not asked you for permission to make a statement and to be questioned by the House.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I have just had the opportunity to look at the Home Secretary's answer, and there may be another reason why, even now, he might feel embarrassed enough to want to come to the House to make a statement. He refers to the setting up of an inquiry into the consequences of banning hunting, whereas an honest approach would be to set up an inquiry and a royal commission into fox control generally. Will my right hon. Friend speculate as to why the Home Secretary is setting up a much more limited inquiry?

Madam Speaker: Order. I will not allow the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) to speculate on that. As the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) knows, the right hon. Member is doing very well simply by making passing references to subjects, but I cannot allow him to discuss the details.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. For the new Members of the House, will you offer us your guidance as to when it is appropriate for a Minister to answer a question on a matter of considerable public interest via a written answer as opposed to making a statement in the House?

Madam Speaker: Ministers' choices are not a matter for me.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Am I right in thinking that it would be almost unprecedented for a Minister to make a statement to the House about the mechanism whereby an agreed policy was delivered?

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Lady is correct. I caution the House that we must not get into such details on this motion. The right hon. Gentleman who had the Floor was conducting himself quite properly, but I hope that he will not be led down the path by some of his colleagues.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. If the Government approach the House authorities about an issue on which a Minister had said that the authorities would not be approached until a particular inquiry had been completed, will the House authorities say that they will not talk to the Minister because he had said that he would not approach them earlier? The detail of the Home Secretary's answer says specifically that the House authorities will be consulted, but, in the next paragraph, it states that the inquiry will take place first. What responsibility do the House authorities have for carrying out the Minister's words?

Madam Speaker: That is totally hypothetical at this stage. I would like the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst to continue.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would it not be in order, before the House adjourns, for the Prime Minister, recognising the inadequacy of one of his answers yesterday, to come before us to provide further and better particulars of his view and that of the Government on the matter in question?

Madam Speaker: Any Minister, including the Prime Minister, can come before the House when they have something to say.

Mr. Forth: I was considering the possibility of another place making further amendments to the House of Lords Bill. I was doing that in the context of yesterday's debate and considering whether we would benefit from a further amendment that would establish a timetable for stage 2 of the reforms. One of the things to emerge clearly from yesterday's debate was the widespread unease and dissatisfaction in the House about the fact that we are being asked to endorse an important constitutional change with no sign or commitment from the Government about the timetable for a further stage of that reform. That is a good reason for the House to be careful about adjourning prematurely, because we might want to give very full consideration to further changes that the other place might want to make to the House of Lords Bill.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Government say that the steps that they have taken so far for the House of Lords are merely interim measures.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have already cautioned the House, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening. Members must not go into the details of legislation. There is a motion on the Order Paper which, at the moment, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst is debating quite correctly.

Mr. Forth: I believe that another possibility exists. Either an emergency Bill could be tabled in another place, or a statement could be made by a Minister—I accept that, as yet, none has been requested—on the matter of probity, openness and reliability of information given in the House of Commons.

One of the weaknesses evident in the House over the past few months has become even more critical recently. That is the ability of hon. Members—especially Labour Members—to make statements in the House that are demonstrably and patently unverifiable. I think that I am correct in saying that it would be possible for the House of Lords to introduce an emergency Bill even at this late stage in the Session—although some other mechanism may exist—that would allow us to give the National Audit Office or the Public Accounts Committee, for example, a role in ensuring the immediate correction of misleading and false information purveyed or peddled in this House. I feel that, given what has happened recently, the House is coming to the view that a proper mechanism to ensure that should exist.

I do not want to test your patience any further, Madam Speaker, and I know that this is a matter largely for your judgment. My intention was to give you an idea of why I believe that it is of the utmost importance that the House must not adjourn at this stage. Today is a parliamentary day, and proper opportunity must be given for matters to be considered for the benefit of all our constituents.

12.51 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): If the motion is agreed to, the hon. Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) will not be able to introduce his Adjournment debate. Leaving party politics aside, I believe that an extra reason not to agree with the motion is that the names of hon. Members come to the top of the Adjournment debates lottery only infrequently. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to say a few words about buses in north Derbyshire if he chooses to explain why he supports the motion, or otherwise.

The matter that I raised in my further point of order, Madam Speaker, which you dealt with well—

Madam Speaker: Very well.

Hon. Members: Extremely well.

Mr. Bottomley: I have reflected on your judgment, and a slight ambiguity remains. You confirmed that there is an opportunity for the Home Secretary or another Home Office Minister to come to the House and ask to make a statement. I shall read the two relevant sentences from the written answer. The answer states:

"We shall consult the House authorities, as appropriate, on how this can best be taken forward.

The Government have decided that there should first be an inquiry."

There is a paragraph break between those two sentences, but a normal understanding of their meaning would be that the Government are committing themselves to delay consulting the House authorities until an inquiry has reported in the spring.

The first question that arises has to do with who the "House authorities" are. We have tiptoed around that problem on previous occasions when the House authorities instructed counsel to go to the High Court or to the Appeal Court. I shall take the phrase "House authorities" to mean a mixture of Murdo Maclean, the private secretary to the Government Chief Whip, and the Clerk's Office. That would probably give us the best group. Should Mr. Maclean or the Clerk's Office respond to the Government if, before spring, the Government ask for advice about how to execute a procedural move—what opponents might see as a wangle, and supporters as assistance—with regard to the Bill that failed in this House a year ago?

I hope, Madam Speaker, that you will be able to give guidance to the House authorities as to whether they should say to the Government, "If you want to talk to us before the inquiry has reported, there must be a further parliamentary answer, so that the House will know the basis on which we are proceeding."

There are other reasons for prolonging the debate until Ministers are able to come to the House. According to an argument that I shall not pursue at length, the subject to fill the gap between questions on a prorogation day and the expectation of a royal commission should be that of the last early-day motion on the Order Paper. I do not need to remind the House that early-day motion 1011 is about the conduct of the Prime Minister.

Unusually, there have been four early-day motions on that subject in this Session. The Prime Minister has chosen to respond to none of them, and neither has any response from him, either through the House authorities or the usual channels, been available for debate. I shall not go into detail, but early-day motion 1011 has been tabled as a consequence of answers that he gave at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, which he must have believed to be true.

I raise this matter now because it has not been picked up by the media. When I asked the BBC whether its correspondents had checked that the Prime Minister had got his facts right—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member of Parliament, but he is straying from the motion before us. I have been very tolerant, but I think that he knows that he must get back to the motion.

Mr. Bottomley: Your guidance, Madam Speaker, is that I should not further illustrate why the Prime Minister should not respond to the early-day motion.

Madam Speaker: Order. I bring the hon. Gentleman back to the motion before us.

Mr. Bottomley: Which is that this House shall adjourn.

Mr. Dale Campbell–Savours (Workington): Shall not adjourn.

Mr. Bottomley: If we agree the motion quickly, there will be no further discussion in the House until notice of the Royal Commission is received. I think that I have got that right; I am grateful to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) for his intervention. If, during that period of silence, a Minister asked whether he could make a statement on the written answer on foxhunting, on the early-day motion on the Prime Minister's conduct or on early-day motion 1007 on the conduct of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, could the House then resume? That is a question to which the House does not know the answer, but no doubt you will be able to tell us, Madam Speaker.

I believe that the arguments for using this time to hold the Government to account are good reasons why the debate on the motion to adjourn should continue.

[Mr. Bottomley]

Of course, the Prime Minister could at this moment be on a plane on his way to South Africa, where he no doubt has international duties, and the Chancellor may have decided to leave because he would not give straight answers at Question Time.

I hope that, in the next Session of Parliament, if not in this one, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor will respond to the early-day motions on their conduct. If they think that criticism does not matter, they do not understand the role of a free Parliament in a free country.

12.57 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Last night, we discussed the proposals in another place that will fundamentally change the country's constitutional balance. I believe it important that, before we adjourn, there should be an opportunity for the Government to produce the regulations that they have so far failed to produce with regard to those Members of another place who, from today, will no longer have a right to attend the House of peers.

In our democracy, everybody who is a British citizen and fulfils certain requirements is entitled to a vote at elections. That is enshrined in our democracy, and is the critical part of our democratic process. As a result of the legislation on the arrangements for another place that will—today, I assume—be reaching the end of its passage through this House, there will be, if my mathematics is correct, just over 500 individuals who, until today, have been—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am listening very carefully to what hon. Members are saying, but they are now straying far from the motion that is before us. I ask them to look at it; I know full well what we are doing at this particular time.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful for your guidance, Madam Speaker, and do not wish to test your patience. However, I am worried that we may adjourn before the legislation that we have sent to the other place has been tidied up so that individuals are not disenfranchised.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may make passing references, but he is getting into matters of great detail. Quite frankly, he should bring his remarks to a close rather than go into details discussed during the passage of the legislation.

Mr. Burns: Madam Speaker, I am again grateful and shall again seek not to try your patience. I remain bothered that, before we adjourn, the other place has time to discuss the Bill again and to make further amendments that would remove an injustice. A number of people from the other place happen to live in the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The Bill, if unamended, will mean that former members of the other place will be disenfranchised at the by-election there on 25 November. Before we adjourn, the House should allow the other place to amend the legislation, because the Government have singularly failed to produce regulations to enfranchise the disenfranchised.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Alternatively, the House should not adjourn until the business in the other place has been resolved. The Government could then introduce, if they wished to do so, the order necessary to rectify the problem. That must be done, because failure to do so would put us in danger of breaching the human rights convention and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. It is extraordinary that we should be asked to adjourn and to prorogue before next week's state opening when a group of individuals will be disenfranchised at an election in just two weeks' time. Those people are being stripped of their democratic right to cast a vote for a representative in this House, even after the Bill deprives them of their role in the legislative process.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid–Dorset and North Poole): Clause 4(3) of the House of Lords Bill, as amended, does not confer a right to vote on peers removed from the House of Lords by the Bill. Instead, it allows the Secretary of State to make an order to allow peers to vote. No such order has been made, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will shortly ask when such an order will be laid before us.

Mr. Burns: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. It seems inconceivable that the Government have not produced that order. It has always been likely that the House of Lords Bill would be on the statute book by the time that we prorogued. The Government have had plenty of time to prepare regulations and place them before the House. For whatever reason, they have not done so, and they seem relaxed about disenfranchising individuals. The other place should amend the Bill to do the job that the Government have failed to do.

Mr. Fraser: The Government argue that it is not possible to update the electoral register. In fact, the Lords are already on it.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is not uncommon, if the Government find an argument difficult, for them to give it a gloss that has little relation to reality. In fact, the other place could easily amend the Bill. The electoral register came into force in February. Members of the other place were given a vote for the European elections, and they can vote in local elections. That proves that there is no problem with the register. The Lords are already on the register, though far from voting at a general election. The other place could amend the legislation today and send it back to us. Then, if we had not adjourned, we would be able to endorse what it had done, so that peers who will no longer be in another place after today could vote in the by-election.

Mr. Bercow: I am following the impeccable logic of my hon. Friend's thesis and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser), but may I suggest another altogether more prosaic reason why the House should not adjourn yet? The other place will not meet and consider any messages that it might wish to send to us about last night's proceedings for about two and a half hours. In the light of the extraordinary ill grace with which the Government have treated the other place in recent times, is it not a matter of elementary courtesy that we should be here to deliberate upon, and

respond to, any messages, rather than obliging noble members of the other place to wait at least six days to hear of our consideration and our response?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who knows, as does every other Opposition Member, that sadly, over the past two and a half years, we have experienced a Government who have utter contempt for this Chamber. The Government would be more than happy if we adjourned immediately; we are considered a nuisance and an irritant, because we ask awkward questions and highlight the discrepancies and contradictions in what is, I gather, now known as "The Blair Project". The Government are so arrogant that they are not the slightest bit interested in anyone else's point of view.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten me? I fail to see the logic of his position and that of his hon. Friends. My understanding of the motion on the Order Paper—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hold it up; that is his script."] It is not a script, it is the Order Paper. My understanding of the motion before us is that Madam Speaker

"shall not adjourn the House"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray, he can read."] Opposition Members seem to have confused adjournment with suspension.

Mr. Burns: I notice that, probably out of embarrassment caused by that inadequate intervention, the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), is moving along the Bench away from the hon. Gentleman. Clearly she briefed him but he did not fully understand—now, obviously, she feels that, out of loyalty, to save his face, she must return and sit in front of him.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the motion says that we "shall not adjourn". If I did not understand that, Madam Speaker, you would not have allowed me to continue to contribute to the debate. I shall spell it out for the hon. Gentleman. I am arguing that it is right that the House should not adjourn until another place has had the opportunity to amend the legislation that we sent back to it last night. Then, the members of the other place who are to leave it for good when we prorogue would be able to vote in the Kensington and Chelsea by-election. So far, the Government have failed to place the regulations before the two Houses.

Mr. Gardiner: So precisely what is the disagreement between the hon. Gentleman and the motion on the Order Paper? The motion says that the House should not adjourn, the implication being that it should suspend and therefore could be recalled at any time, should that become necessary.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) to wander around the Chamber, chatting to his friends and walking in front of those who are trying to address the Chair?

Madam Speaker: Members very often move around this House, but it is better not to move in front of the person who is being addressed.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Hawkins: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Following earlier points of order about the Home Secretary's written answer this morning, I notice that it says:

"The inquiry will be chaired by the noble Lords,"—

in the plural—

"Lord Burns."

That may be the result of the extreme haste with which the written answer was rushed out, but it occurs to me that, given that the other place is still considering the House of Lords Bill and the statement goes on to say that the other members of the inquiry will be announced later, even at this late stage, the Government might decide to retain in office some noble Lords so that they might be members of the inquiry, and that is another reason why you might feel that the Home Secretary should make a statement, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was aware of our new procedures whereby it is possible to raise a point of order during a Division, but it must relate to the Division. Had he given me some indication of his point of order, I could have saved him from making it.

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The annunciator screen shows only the word "Closure", not "Division", and some hon. Members are not aware that a Division is in progress.

Madam Speaker: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. The screen does say "Closure" and that could be misleading. It should say "Closure motion. Division". I shall see that that is rectified for the next Session. Thank you for drawing that to my attention.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As there was confusion over what the monitors said around the House, should we not declare the Division null and void and have a second Division, so that all Members can vote?

Madam Speaker: I am not prepared to accept that procedure. The Division stands.

The House having divided: Ayes 258, Noes 72.

Division No. 322] **[1.10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond

Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*

Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Syms, Robert
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wells, Bowen
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. Keith Simpson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly,

That, at this day's sitting,

1. the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Messages from the Lords shall have been received; and

2. if the House has completed its consideration of any Messages received from the Lords and the Lords have adjourned their sitting, the Speaker shall adjourn the House without Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 269, Noes 74.

Division No. 323] **[1.25 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark

Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Syms, Robert
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wells, Bowen
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting,

1. the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Messages from the Lords shall have been received; and

2. if the House has completed its consideration of any Messages received from the Lords and the Lords have adjourned their sitting, the Speaker shall adjourn the House without Question put.

Mr. Fraser: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you issued the writ for the Kensington and Chelsea by-election, would it be possible for you to speak to the appropriate authorities, so that peers who are on the electoral register and who, from tomorrow, will be legally entitled to vote will be able to exercise that right? In another place, Lady Jay promised that the enfranchisement of those peers would immediately follow the passage of the House of Lords Bill.

Madam Speaker: I had responsibility for issuing the writ for the by-election, and I did so; but I have no responsibility for the electorate in the area.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I seek your guidance? I understand that, because we voted for the motion, we can now be summoned back at any time by the Leader of the House, whereas, if we had not voted for it, we would have had to wait until 7 pm. Am I right in thinking that we can be summoned back before 7 pm for any reason, not just because messages may have arrived from the other place—for instance, because of the screaming headlines in all today's papers about the crisis in the beef industry? The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food might want to make a statement about that.

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman had read the motion, he would know that only a message from the Lords can bring us back.

Mr. Hawkins: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall that, during the first of the two Divisions that have just taken place, I sought to raise a matter arising from the written answer that the Home Secretary gave this morning, and you advised me that it would not be appropriate for me to make a point of order at that stage because a point of order during a Division could relate only to that Division.

May I now return to the written answer? According to the Home Secretary, the inquiry that he has announced

"will be chaired by the noble Lords,"—

plural—

"Lord Burns."

We all know that Lord Burns was the super-mandarin when he was permanent secretary to the Treasury, but I do not think that even he would describe himself in the plural.

The written answer continues:

"The names of the other members of the inquiry will be announced as soon as possible."

Is it not possible, even at this late stage, that a Minister might make an announcement that, on reflection, he thought it important to recognise the historic service to this country given by many noble Lords who, even if they were not among the 92 retaining their seats, might—given their experience of country sports—be appropriate members of the inquiry? In those circumstances, might there not be a message from their lordships amending the House of Lords Bill to enable them to serve?

Madam Speaker: That is highly unlikely. As I said earlier, we are waiting only for Lords messages. I anticipate that the Lords will be dealing with the House of Lords Bill at 3 o'clock this afternoon. We must await the message that will come from the Lords at that time.

Pursuant to the Order of the House this day, the sitting is suspended. Before the sitting resumes, I shall see that the Division Bells are sounded so that all Members are made aware of it.

1.41 pm

Sitting suspended.

5.5 pm

On resuming—

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners:

The House went; and, having returned:

Royal Assent

5.36 pm

Madam Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that the House has been to the House of Peers, where a Commission under the Great Seal was read, authorising the Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Food Standards Act 1999

Greater London Authority Act 1999

Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999

Contracts (Right of Third Parties) Act 1999

Mental Health (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1999

Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

House of Lords Act 1999

Prorogation

Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Madam Speaker: I have further to acquaint the House that the Lord High Chancellor, one of the Lord Commissioners, delivered Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command. For greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy and also directed that the terms of the speech be printed in the Journal of the House. Copies are being made available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I were pleased to receive the State Visits of His Excellency the President of Germany last December, of His Excellency the President of Hungary last June and of His Excellency the President of the People's Republic of China in October.

We recall with pleasure our State Visit to Korea in April.

We were delighted to pay State Visits to Ghana, and South Africa, over the last four days, and to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

My Government have taken action to build a platform of economic stability and steady growth, based on clear long-term objectives for monetary and fiscal policy, with openness and transparency in policy making.

My Government's goal is high and stable levels of growth and employment. The new system of monetary policy-making ensures that interest rate decisions are taken in the best long-term interests of the economy. As a result, the UK now has a sound and credible platform of stability. Inflation is historically low and expected to remain close to target. And long-term interest rates are also at historically low levels. Employment is up by over half a million since the election, with more people in work in Britain today than ever before.

To ensure high levels of employment, my Government are extending the new deal, to help more young people and the long-term unemployed. And my Government are tackling the poverty and unemployment traps. To make work pay and encourage job creation, they have introduced the national minimum wage and the new 10p starting rate of tax, cut the basic rate of income tax from next April, and reformed national insurance. And the Working Families Tax Credit, introduced in October, is helping to make work pay for low-paid working families.

My Government are continually looking at ways to improve productivity, including in the public sector. They have set tough targets for outputs from every department in Public Service Agreements.

My Government's legislation to raise standards for all children is now coming into effect. There has been a widespread reduction in the number of children in infant classes of over 30 and there is extensive support for the literacy and numeracy strategies. My Government published the Teachers Green Paper—the most radical reform of the teaching profession in a generation—and has since announced progress towards a new pay structure for teachers.

Parliament has passed for the first time legislation for the creation of a Disability Rights Commission, which will help create a positive climate for people with disabilities in their lives and work.

My Government have put in place the framework for a modern National Health Service. An Act has been passed to replace the NHS internal market with decentralised arrangements based on partnership, quality and efficiency. Waiting lists have been reduced by 200,000 since their high point in April 1998, and by 69,000 since March 1997.

An Act has been passed to establish a Food Standards Agency to protect public health and the interests of consumers in relation to food.

Legislation has been enacted to support minimum standards at work, to promote partnership and to make it easier for people to combine family responsibilities and employment.

An Act has been passed which takes forward my Government's programme of welfare reform, promoting work for those who are able to work and security for those who cannot.

My Government have begun the modernisation of local government. Legislation has been enacted to secure the delivery of high quality local services on a sound financial basis.

My Government have begun the process of restoring democratic, city-wide government in London. Legislation was enacted to establish the Greater London Authority, providing London with a new form of strategic governance.

An Act has been passed which will enable the implementation of the EU Directive on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control, which will maintain a coherent pollution control regime for the United Kingdom.

Legislation has been enacted to provide a fair basis for water charging in England and Wales.

An Act has been passed to modernise and strengthen immigration control. It will speed up the system of immigration and asylum appeals. This Act is essential to the delivery of a fairer, faster and firmer immigration and asylum system to which my Government is committed.

An Act has been passed which creates a new sentencing disposal for first-time defendants pleading guilty in the youth court and introduces new measures to help vulnerable witnesses to give their best evidence in criminal trials.

Legislation has been enacted to establish a Community Legal Service and a Criminal Defence Service. They will replace existing legal aid arrangements and enable resources to be better targeted. The Act also extends the use of conditional fees, removes unnecessary restrictions on the provision of legal services and makes reforms to magistrates' courts and the appeals system. This will increase access to justice. Other law reform measures have been enacted.

As a first step in a process of reform, legislation has been enacted to remove the automatic right of hereditary peers to membership of the House of Lords.

The people of Scotland and Wales voted to have their own Parliament and National Assembly and it was my pleasure with The Duke of Edinburgh and The Prince of Wales to open the National Assembly of Wales on 26th May and to open the Scottish Parliament on 1st July.

In Northern Ireland, my Government have continued to work to secure the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. They have, in co-operation with the Irish Government, established a review to overcome difficulties in its implementation. They have welcomed the Report of the Independent Commission on Policing.

Members of the House of Commons

I thank you for the provision you have made for the work and dignity of the Crown and for the public service.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

Over the last year, my Government have played a leading role in the European Union. They have continued to strengthen bilateral relations with our partners. My Government have welcomed the entry into force of new treaty provisions which strengthen the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy and have welcomed the appointment of the first High Representative. In cooperation with other Member States, they ensured a successful outcome to the Agenda 2000 negotiations that maintained the United Kingdom's budget abatement.

My Government have played a key role in preparing the European Union for the historic challenge of enlargement. They have also helped the applicant countries prepare for membership.

My Government welcomed the launch of the euro on 1 January. They have published an outline National Changeover Plan, which could be implemented should Britain decide to join. They have welcomed the appointment of a new European Commission, committed to reform.

My Government have maintained strong and modern defence for Britain based on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. They played a leading role in the decisions taken at NATO's 50th Anniversary summit in Washington to modernise further and prepare the Alliance for the challenges and opportunities it will face in the new century.

My Government launched an historic initiative at the Franco-British St. Malo Summit. This will make the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy more effective and will revitalise the Atlantic Alliance.

My Government launched an initiative at the British-Italian London Summit to improve the effectiveness of European defence forces. My Government have continued successfully to restructure the Armed Forces to meet the demands of the modern world.

My Government reaffirmed its commitment to support the United Nations by signing a Memorandum of Understanding declaring United Kingdom forces potentially available for United Nations' peacekeeping Operations and by announcing its intention to make an increased contribution to UN police operations.

My Government made a substantial and vital contribution to the success of the international community's diplomatic, political and military efforts to halt and reverse ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Following the end of the conflict, my Government have played an important role in reconstructing Kosovo and preparing it for free and fair elections.

My Government's political, military and financial commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued to help build peace there.

My Government has supported the democratic transition in Indonesia and has played a leading role, including a military contribution, in the UN process to help bring self-determination to the people of East Timor.

Following the abolition of the death penalty under United Kingdom law, my Government signed and ratified the 6th Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights.

My Government have published a white paper proposing a new partnership with our Overseas Territories and offering British citizenship to their people.

My Government have negotiated new arrangements which re-establish links between the Falkland Islands and Argentina.

After extensive diplomatic effort by my Government, the Government of Libya finally agreed to hand over the two suspects in the Lockerbie bombing case. We are pleased that my Government subsequently reached an agreement on the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Libya.

My Government supported and welcomed the transition to democratic civilian government in Nigeria.

My Government have played a leading role in securing international agreement to reduce further the debt burden of very poor countries. My Government have put into place a strategy to increase the proportion of the United Kingdom's bilateral development assistance going to low income countries and to increase the focus of the multilateral agencies on the reduction of poverty. An Act has been passed to convert the Commonwealth Development Corporation to a public-private partnership enabling it to make a larger contribution to development by channelling increased private sector investment into the poorest countries.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may attend you.

A Commission was also read for proroguing this present Parliament, and the Lord Chancellor said:

"My Lords and Members of the House of Commons: by virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has now been read, we do, in Her Majesty's name, and in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to Wednesday the seventeenth day of this instant November, to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to Wednesday the seventeenth day of this instant November."

End of the Second Session (opened on 24 November 1998) of the Fifty-Second Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in the Forty-Eighth Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 1 November 1999

PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Mr. Brady: To ask the Prime Minister when he will reply to a letter dated 12 October 1999 from Dr. S. L. McKee of Devisdale Road, Bowdon, regarding his decision to appoint the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. [95333]

The Prime Minister: My Office did so on Friday 22 October 1999.

Kosovo

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 July 1999, *Official Report*, column 27, concerning his meeting with KLA officials on 18 May, who were the officials referred to in his answer. [95419]

The Prime Minister: At the meeting, which was held in Tirana, Albania, I was accompanied by my Foreign Affairs Private Secretary, a senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office official and an interpreter.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how many bodies of victims of war crimes, by nationality, have been uncovered in Kosovo. [95545]

The Prime Minister: The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which is responsible for investigating alleged war crimes in Kosovo, is collating the results of forensic work undertaken over the last four months. UK forensic teams have made a major contribution to this work. Within the next few weeks, ICTY should be able to confirm the number of bodies of victims which have been uncovered. Our estimate is that at least 10,000 civilians were killed between June 1998 and June 1999. Most of the victims have been Kosovar Albanians although the bodies of some Serbs have also been recovered.

British Business Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 July 1999, *Official Report*, column 26, what criteria are used to assess the effectiveness of the work of the Ambassadors for British Business initiative. [95785]

The Prime Minister: The Ambassadors for British Business Initiative is a voluntary scheme in which participating business leaders make time when overseas on company business to promote the UK's wider commercial interests. The main criterion used to assess the effectiveness of the Ambassadors for British Business initiative is feedback from the Heads of our overseas posts. This has shown that the Ambassadors for Business are achieving their objectives of promoting and raising the profile of British Business.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those areas *(a)* the EU Presidency, *(b)* the Commission and *(c)* the Government have expressed a willingness to discuss at the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference. [95543]

The Prime Minister: Neither the Presidency nor the Commission has yet formally stated its position on the IGC. The Presidency is currently preparing a report that it will present to the Helsinki European Council in December. The Dehaene Report, published on 18 October, was commissioned to feed ideas into the Commission before the next IGC. The Commission will now consider the report and submit its formal opinion in due course.

The Government, along with the other member states outlined their position at the European Council in Cologne. This called for an IGC dealing primarily with the institutional issues not resolved at Amsterdam (Commission size, vote reweighting, possible extension of QMV). The Government will issue a White Paper before the IGC begins next year.

Ministers

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total number of Government Ministers on 1 January for each year since 1979. [96190]

The Prime Minister: The information is given in the table for January each year.

Date	*Number of ministers*
22 January 1979	109
21 January 1980	106
19 January 1981	106
18 January 1982	107
17 January 1983	107
16 January 1984	102
14 January 1985	106
20 January 1986	106
12 January 1987	107
11 January 1988	105
16 January 1989	106
15 January 1990	106
21 January 1991	108
20 January 1992	108
18 January 1993	108
11 January 1994	107
10 January 1995	109
9 January 1996	109
13 January 1997	109
12 January 1998	113
11 January 1999	115
27 October 1999	109

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister how many letters he has received from pensioners on the subject of the April 2000 pensions uprating since the publication of the RPI for the year to September 1999. [96191]

The Prime Minister: Since 12 October, my Office have received approximately 800 letters about the uprating of pensions.

European Charter of Rights

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what statements he has made concerning the decisions made at the European Councils, at Cologne, and at Tampere relating to the establishment of a body to draw up the text of a draft European charter of human rights; and what action is now planned by Her Majesty's Government to implement that decision. [96500]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the Answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 28 June 1999, *Official Report*, column *20*, following the decisions of the Cologne European Council.

The then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), wrote to the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) and the Chairman of the European Communities Committee in the Other Place (Lord Tordoff) on 7 October enclosing the Presidency's proposals for the practical arrangements governing the Charter drafting body. These were finalised and agreed by Heads of Government at Tampere, and are annexed to the Tampere conclusions, copies of which were deposited in the Libraries on 19 October. The first meeting of the drafting body is scheduled for 17 December. I will be nominating a representative shortly.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the means by which hon. Members will be selected to serve on the drafting body of the working group to establish a European Charter of Rights. [96584]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary wrote to Madam Speaker and to my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor on 19 October inviting them to nominate two hon. Members and two alternates.

Government Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the targets to be met by central Government *(a)* set and *(b)* announced by him since May 1997, indicating in each case (i) the target to be met and (ii) the date by which it is to be met. [95820]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The extra investment that the Government have made, particularly in our key priority areas of health and education, is conditional on achieving higher standards, improved productivity and the modernisation of all our public services. Public Service Agreements set out what departments will deliver by when in return for these additional resources.

Central government itself does not have specific targets beyond those which are the responsibility of the Cabinet Office. The full list of the Government's manifesto commitments, together with a summary of progress to date on each of them, is contained in the Government's Annual Report (Cm 4401).

Chinese President (State Visit)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with Chinese President Jiang Zemin about the political future of Tibet during the State Visit this week. [94928]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* I discussed Tibet with President Jiang Zemin at Downing Street on 21 October both during our bilateral talks, and at the lunch which followed. It is the Government's firm view that Tibetans should have a greater say in running their own affairs in Tibet. The best way to achieve this is through dialogue between the Chinese and the Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama. We take every opportunity to encourage both sides to enter into such dialogue.

In his discussion with the Chinese Foreign Minister on 20 October 1999, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary again urged the Chinese to enter into dialogue with the Dalai Lama on the future of Tibet. The Chinese replied that the door for dialogue was open provided the Dalai Lama discarded his proposals for independence and recognised one China, including Taiwan as a province.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what communications his office had with (i) other Government departments and (ii) police forces, pertaining to the treatment of demonstrators during the state visit by the President of China. [96580]

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Prime Minister what representations were made by his office to *(a)* the Metropolitan Police, *(b)* the Royal Parks Police and *(c)* Cambridgeshire Police about the policing of the state visit of the President of China. [96491]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* None.

Tampere Presidency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what additional co-operation, under paragraph 11 of the Tampere Presidency Conclusions, is intended with respect to *(a)* combating poverty, *(b)* preventing conflicts and *(c)* ensuring rights for women and children; what Treaty base will apply; what budget sums will be involved; and what budget line will be their source. [96576]

The Prime Minister: These issues are covered under paragraph 11 in Section AI of the Tampere Presidency Conclusions. The intention is that these issues should be pursued as part of the future work of the High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration, whose mandate was extended by the Special European Council at Tampere.

Appropriate Treaty bases and budgetary issues will be considered as implementation of the Action Plans progresses.

It is unlikely that implementation could be undertaken within existing resources and the UK will give careful consideration to the financial implications of any specific measures which emerge.

Secretary for Appointments

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister when the name of his new Secretary for Appointments will be announced; what process was used to recruit and select the new secretary; who is the head of the department to which the secretary is responsible; and what is his job specification. [96658]

The Prime Minister: The name of my new Secretary for Appointments was announced on 11 October. He is William Chapman, a career civil servant on secondment from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The selection process, including an interdepartmental trawl, was based on normal Civil Service appointment practices. My Principal Private Secretary has line management responsibility for this post. The Secretary for Appointments advises me on a wide range of Crown Appointments and on a number of appointments which I make in my own right; he also offers advice on related policy matters and undertakes duties in relation to the honours system. The Appointments Secretary also acts as Ecclesiastical Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, with overall responsibility for advising on the appointments to certain cathedral canonries and parishes.

European Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Prime Minister what opinion research the Government have commissioned on attitudes to *(a)* Economic and Monetary Union and *(b)* the European Union, indicating the polling organisations used in each case. [96844]

The Prime Minister: The Government commissioned a survey on attitudes to Europe, which included questions on EMU, in November 1997. The contract was won by GGC/NOP following a tender process. A copy of the results was placed in the Libraries of the House in April 1998.

Government Contracts

Mr. Cash: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the pending Government contracts with French firms. [96843]

The Prime Minister: It is established practice under section 7(a) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information whose disclosure would prejudice commercial or contractural activities.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Regional Chambers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to hold referendums on the introduction of elected regional government in England. [95978]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have made clear that, in time, we will allow the people to decide whether they want directly elected regional government in England, but we have not yet set a timetable for holding referendums.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what have been the set-up costs to date of the regional chambers; and from what sources they have been met. [95977]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The set-up costs of the voluntary regional chambers are a matter for their members. The Government have provided some support in-kind. In the East Midlands, a member of the Government Office staff was seconded to assist with start up arrangements and in the South East the Government Office has provided office space to the chamber.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many regional chambers have been recognised as such under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. [95979]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have designated regional chambers under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 in all eight English regions outside London (where separate arrangements will apply).

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list, by English region (i) the number of full-time equivalent staff employed and (ii) the annual budget for the current year and next year, for each *(a)* Government office, *(b)* regional development agency, *(c)* regional chamber, as designated under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 and *(d)* local government-based regional body which is not a Government office, regional development agency or designated regional chamber. [96006]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 29 October 1999]: (a)* Full-time equivalent staff in each Government Office, as at 1 October 1999, along with the running costs budgets (in £000s) for the current financial year, are in the table. The budgets have not yet been agreed for next year. The Government Offices' Central Unit's budget is included as some funds are held centrally.

Government office	*Staff*	*Running costs for 1999–2000*
GO-NE	227	8,219.57
GO-NW	348	12,753.60
GO-YH	230	8,632.55
GO-WM	219	9,110.85
GO-EM	203	6,855.04
GO-E	156	6,662.32
GO-SE	281	8,425.80
GO-SW	198	7,611.84
GO-L	336	13,665.43
Sub total	2,198	81,937.00
GO-CU	25	3,756.58
Total	2,223	85,693.58

(b) Full-time equivalent staff in the Regional Development Agencies, as at 1 April 1999 (the most recent figures available) and administration budgets for this year and next (in £000s) are as follows:

Regional Development Agency	*Staff*	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*
One North East	203	9,771	9,493
North West	182[1]	12,131	11,933
Yorkshire Forward	174.5	8,036	7,852

Regional Development Agency	Staff	1999–2000	2000–2001
Advantage West Midlands	118.5	7,678	7,509
East Midlands	107	7,155	6,988
East of England	38	4,803	4,649
South East	60	5,225	5,051
South West	143	7,488	7,322
Total	1,026	62,287	60,797

[1] Total staff, not full-time equivalents. No separate figure for part-time staff available.

(c) The budgets and staffing of the voluntary regional chambers are a matter for their members. Details are not held centrally.

(d) I have placed in the Library details provided by the English Regional Associations of the resources deployed by the constituent authorities of the regional planning bodies. The budgets and staffing of local government-based regional bodies are a matter for the members of such bodies.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people are currently employed by One North East; and what have been its administration costs since its establishment. [96733]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The number of staff currently employed by One North East is 238 which in the main reflects the number employed by the partner organisations from which it was formed. For 1999–2000, the net indicative allocation for administration costs is £9,711,000 which will be fully utilised.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Urban White Paper will be published at the same time as the Rural White Paper. [95981]

Mr. Prescott: There are important links to be drawn between the Urban and Rural White Papers, and work on the two White papers is proceeding in tandem. No decision has yet been taken on the timing of publication.

New Houses (Oxfordshire)

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many houses he estimates will need to be built in Oxfordshire by 2016. [96561]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Requirements for future house building in Oxfordshire are currently under review as part of the preparation of Regional Planning Guidance for the South East. This guidance will set out housing requirements by county, including Oxfordshire, for the years 1996 to 2016. An independent Panel examined draft proposals prepared by local authorities at a Public Examination over the summer. The report setting out the conclusions of this panel has recently been received by the Secretary of State who will examine its recommendations very closely. It is anticipated that a draft version of regional planning guidance following on from this exercise will be published early in the new year, and a period of consultation on the proposals will allow interested parties to respond before full guidance is issued by the Secretary of State later in the year.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how often the UK Round Table on Sustainable Development met in 1999. [96556]

Ms Beverley Hughes: My understanding is that the UK Round Table on Sustainable Development will have met six times in plenary session during 1999.

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes to publish new indicators on sustainable development. [96558]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We plan to publish within the next couple of months a report giving details and analysis of around 150 indicators of sustainable development, which underpin the Strategy "A better quality of life", published in May 1999.

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how often the British Government Panel on Sustainable Development met in 1999. [96557]

Ms Beverley Hughes: My understanding is that the British Government Panel on Sustainable Development will have met six times during 1999.

Brown-field Sites

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he has issued to local authorities relating to the use of brown-field sites for housebuilding in areas where there is a lack of such sites; and if his target of two thirds use of brown-field sites for new housebuilding is measured by county. [96043]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* Our draft revision of Planning Policy Guidance note 3: Housing provides guidance on how to accommodate housing needs in all types of areas. It is for authorities to develop their strategies in the light of that guidance. The final version of PPG3 should be published very shortly.

The Government's national target is that 60 per cent. of new housing, including conversions, should be developed on previously-developed land. Local planning authorities are required to set their own recycling targets, consistent with national and regional targets.

Travellers

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if powers are currently available to local authorities to enable them to

prevent repeated incursions on a particular piece of land by the same group of travellers without having to go back to the courts on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [96711]

Mr. Mullin: Section 77(3) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 makes it a criminal offence for a person who has been directed by a local authority to leave land where he is camped without permission, and to return to the same land with a vehicle within three months of the date of the direction. Persons committing an offence under section 77 are liable to a maximum fine of £1,000.

In proceedings for an offence under this section, it is a defence for the accused to show that his re-entry to the land with a vehicle was due to illness, mechanical breakdown, or other emergency.

We have no plans to remove the requirement in the 1994 Act for local authorities to obtain a court order before eviction can take place.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94984]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its PSA, and the measures of success it will use in the Output and Performance Analysis (OPA) published in March this year. A full list of the targets and target dates for Agencies and Executive NDPBs can be found annually in the Next Steps and Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies report.

High-level targets not covered by the PSA include:

Target	*Target date*
Reducing emissions of sulphur dioxide by 80 per cent. against 1980 baselines	2010
Reducing emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) by 30 per cent. against 1988 baselines	1999
Achieving air quality objectives in the UK National Air Quality Strategy	2005
Reduce road traffic casualties by a third of the average for 1981–85	2000
Improve energy efficiency on the Government estate by 20 per cent.	31 March 2000

These high-level targets are supported at operational level by numerous targets to ensure delivery by individual units.

Rural Rail Services

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase the provision of rural rail services; and if he will make a statement. [96601]

Mr. Hill: Where services are heavily dependent on subsidy, as in rural areas, Passenger Service Requirements reflect closely the level of services operated by British Rail at the time of franchising. We have made available an additional £100 million over the next three years for a new Rail Passenger Partnership scheme aimed specifically at providing support for locally sponsored services that are not commercially viable. This is being administered by the Franchising Director.

Disability Grants

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what grants are available to disabled people to enable them to fit aids in their homes; what is the maximum total value to an individual of those grants; if they vary in value depending on the type of house; and if he will make a statement. [96695]

Mr. Mullin: Disabled facilities grants, which are administered by local housing authorities, are available to disabled people to help them carry out essential adaptations to their homes. Mandatory grants, which are subject to a test of resources, are available up to a maximum of £20,000 per application, but authorities have powers to give additional grant above that level. The value of each grant depends on the cost of the works required and on the resources that the applicant is assessed to have, and is not affected by the type of house occupied by the applicant. Local housing authorities also have powers to give home repair assistance, which is not means-tested, for minor works up to a maximum of £2,000.

Wildlife

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation relating to wildlife; and if he will make a statement. [96698]

Mr. Mullin: The Government are committed to introducing legislation to improve the protection and management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and to strengthen the enforcement provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. We will take action as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Planning Guidance

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish the comprehensive list of current planning guidance issued by his Department announced in the Modernising Planning Progress report. [96929]

Mr. Raynsford: I have today published a list of current planning policy guidance on the Department's website at http://www.databases.detr.gov.uk/planning/npp/. This list, which is the first of its kind, will be a useful tool for local authorities, planners, developers, academics and the general public.

Besides listing the guidance contained in Departmental Circulars, Planning Policy Guidance Notes, Minerals Policy Guidance Notes and Regional Planning Guidance Notes, the list will also include key statements to Parliament, a list of research reports and best practice

advice published by the Department. We shall update the list as and when new guidance is issued or existing guidance is modified. In the meantime, we are working to make as many of the documents as possible directly accessible by hypertext link from the list.

This initiative is a practical demonstration of the government's policy to increase substantially the volume of business transacted by electronic means.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what date he will publish Design in the Planning System. [96598]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Good Practice Guide on Design in the Planning System will be an important contribution to our commitment to achieving urban renaissance. It must therefore be right. We therefore intend to publish it once we are satisfied that it is capable of meeting our requirements.

Housing Subsidy (West Oxfordshire)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on West Oxfordshire District Council's revenue and capital spending of his changes to the negative housing subsidy regime. [96599]

Mr. Mullin: My Department will be consulting later this Autumn on the detail of the proposals for changes in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy regime. Consideration of the outcome of that exercise will be required before any decisions are taken. It is too early to say what the impact of any changes will be. The implications for any authority will depend upon both the results of the consultation exercise and conditions pertaining nearer the time that any changes are made.

Local Government

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for changes to the structure of local government in England. [96689]

Ms Beverley Hughes: There are no plans at present to reform the structure of local government in England. Our programme of reform for local government is about how councils work and how they can be more in touch with the people whom they serve. This will also give the stability that local government needs in order to deliver an efficient and effective service.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Restraining Orders

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what requirement there is for all parties to be *(a)* informed and *(b)* represented before a restraining order can be agreed to by the courts; and if he will make a statement. [96699]

Jane Kennedy: Under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, a court sentencing or otherwise dealing with a person convicted of an offence under section 2 or 4 of the Act may make a restraining order under section 5 of the Act to protect the victim of the offence (or any other person mentioned in the order) from further harassment. The defendant would be present at the time of sentence and would be entitled to be represented. The parties in a criminal trial are the prosecution and the defendant. There is no specific requirement for the court to inform the victim or any other person mentioned in the order, or for those persons to be represented at court, before the order is made. In the civil courts, an application for an injunction, the equivalent of a restraining order, would be served on the defendant before the hearing. There is no specific requirement for the defendant to be represented.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all performance targets set for the Lord Chancellor's Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94982]

Jane Kennedy: The Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its PSA, and the measures of success it will use in the Output and Performance Analyses (OPA) published in March this year. The Lord Chancellor's Department Departmental Reports 1998–99 and 1999–2000 include targets and achievement for the Public Records Office, Her Majesty's Land Registry, and the Northern Ireland Court Service. The targets and target dates for the Court Service Agency and the Public Trust Office can be found annually in the Next Steps Report, and for the Legal Aid Board in the annual Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies Report.

DEFENCE

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if an action plan for increasing the representation of women in public life has been *(a)* prepared by his Department and *(b)* published since November 1998. [94853]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 682.

UK BVRAAM Competition

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the expected date on which the Equipment Approval Committee will make its final recommendation for the UK BVRAAM competition. [95347]

Mr. Kilfoyle: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence hopes to reach a decision on the outcome of the competition in the new year.

Fleet Management

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what estimates he has made of the savings in each of the next five years through the RAF private finance initiative for the non-combat vehicle fleet management project; [95755]

(2) what estimate he has made of the economies of scale which could result from a tri-services private finance initiative for non-combat vehicle fleet management; and if he will make a statement. [95795]

Mr. Kilfoyle: A five year PFI contract for the RAF non-combat vehicle fleet was placed in 1996. It is expected to deliver total savings of almost £6 million in Net Present Value terms against conventional procurement methods. Five further non-combat vehicle PFI projects, covering national tri-Service requirements on a regional basis, are under way. It is not possible at this stage to quantify the savings which are expected from the five tri-Service contracts and the re-let of the RAF contract.

Departmental Contracts

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Tayside North of 19 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns *842–43*, on departmental employees, if he will provide figures for research contracts by region for the most recent financial year. [95366]

Mr. Kilfoyle *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The information requested is not available in precisely the form requested. The number and total value of extant research contracts in Financial Year 1998–99 in the following locations is as listed:

Location	*Number of contracts*	*Value of contracts (£)*
(a) London	82	11,695,303
(b) the rest of the South East of England	250	274,714,231
(c) England (including (a) and(b))	908	393,879,546
(d) Scotland	21	1,692,493
(e) Wales	1	26,019
(f) Northern Ireland	0	—

The information cannot be provided by the Regions requested as such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department's police are next due for inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. [96542]

Mr. Spellar: The next inspection of the MOD Police by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary is due in the year 2001.

Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1997

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to ensure that his Department complies with S.I. 1997 No. 135, the Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1997. [96464]

Mr. Kilfoyle: S.I. 1997 No. 135, the Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1997 have been implemented as MOD policy. The instruction was incorporated into the MOD Health and Safety Handbook, Joint Service Publication 375 Volume 2 Chapter 10 in April 1997. A copy of the Joint Service Publication is available in the Library of the House.

Homosexuals

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the possible cost to his Department of retrospective claims for compensation following the ECHR ruling in the cases of Mr. Prean, Mr. Beckett, Miss Smith and Mr. Grady regarding discrimination in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [96889]

Mr. Spellar: In light of the ECHR's judgment on 27 September 1999, the Secretary of State for Defence has authorised that settlement negotiations be entered into with those individuals discharged as a result of their homosexuality who have submitted Employment Tribunal applications.

As these negotiations are currently underway, I am withholding disclosure of my Department's financial provision for settling these claims under Exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Effective Management and Operations of the Public Service) as this information could compromise the negotiations and delay settlement.

Army Establishment

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the net inflow/outflow figures for the Army for each month since January 1998 to date. [96121]

Mr. Spellar: A breakdown of UK Trained Army Personnel inflow and outflow, in the period January 1998 to September/August 1999 (the latest date for which information is presently available), is detailed in the table:

Month	*Outflow*[1]	*Inflow*[2]	*Net flow*
1998			
January	−1,265	974	−291
February	−966	804	−162
March	−899	1,000	101
April	−932	867	−65
May	−947	673	−274
June	−921	841	−80
July	−936	892	−44
August	−961	1,042	81
September	−1,133	901	−232
October	−985	872	−113
November	−804	901	97
December	−795	593	−202
Sub Total	−11,544	10,360	−1,184

Month	Outflow[1]	Inflow[2]	Net flow
1999			
January	−1,124	999	−125
February	−833	798	−35
March	−909	749	−160
April	1,053	970	−83
May	−908	1,010	102
June	−932	854	−78
July	−801	794	−7
August	−822	969	147
September	−962	1,024	62
Sub Total	−8344	8,167	−177

[1] Outflow of UK Trained Army Personnel, includes natural wastage and voluntary wastage.

[2] Inflow to trained strength from basic training of Regular Army Personnel.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Army recruitment and retention. [96065]

Mr. Spellar: The Government inherited a shortfall on Army manning and are committed to achieving full manning by around 2005. We recognise fully that improved recruiting and retention will be key to realising this goal.

In 1998–99, the Army recruited some 610 officers and 15,609 soldiers, which represents 98 per cent. of the overall recruiting target for the year. It was the best recruiting year for the Army since the beginning of the decade and there are encouraging signs that the momentum is being maintained this year. A broad range of national and regional recruiting initiatives are in hand to encourage young people to view the Army as a career of first choice.

The rate at which we lose our people has been too high for too many years, and it is one of this Government's highest priorities to rectify the situation. There has been some improvement in retention in the Army in the last two years, but achieving further improvements remains a challenge. The Army has in hand a series of initiatives as part of its Human Resources Strategy. This includes a six month strategic review being undertaken by external consultants to examine the effectiveness of present Army retention policies, which includes field research and making recommendations for improvements, the results of which will inform the Army's personnel management policies. Other measures to improve retention, which have been welcomed by Army personnel, include an improved operational welfare package, life long learning, and the efforts of the Service Families Task Force.

Depleted Uranium (Iraq)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the amount of uranium dust released in Iraq during the Gulf War from depleted uranium rounds; and what action he proposed to take to manage the risk to public health. [96667]

Mr. Spellar: It is assessed that over 860,000 depleted uranium-based ammunition rounds, of varying calibre, were used by Coalition Forces during the Gulf conflict. Evaluation of the environmental effects of depleted uranium is ongoing.

As part of this work, we would, of course, consider any reliable medical or scientific data which may emerge from any source of risk to public health posed by depleted uranium.

Army Retention Study

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list and summarize the specific areas of research being undertaken as part of the Army's Retention Study. [96837]

Mr. Spellar: The Army Retention Study, which is being undertaken under contract by the Hay Management Group, will draw on and initiate structured quantitative and qualitative market research into retention in the Army. In addition to analysis of existing research and retention initiatives, a programme of field research will be conducted to establish a cross section of views from all ranks, and their families, to determine why people leave the Service and to identify trends. Further consultation will take place with Unit Retention Officers, Policy Staffs, and individuals who have recently joined and left the Army, among others. The Study will consider the extent to which current retention policies and initiatives are effective, and identify areas where they can be improved.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the remit of the Army's Retention Study currently being undertaken by the Hay Management Group. [96834]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *705*.

Service Families Task Force

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify the (i) particular responsibilities, (ii) manner of operation and (iii) decision-making processes of the Ministerial Group, Families Forum and Working Group that make up the Service Families Task Force. [96836]

Mr. Spellar: The Families Forum enables the three Service families associations to raise issues of concern to me and, in turn, allows me to inform them of the progress the Task Force is making. The Ministerial Group identifies the desired outcome to these issues and directs the Working Group of officials to progress them.

Forensic Experts

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many forensic teams are investigating *(a)* war graves and *(b)* sites of war crimes; and which countries they represent. [96097]

Mr. Hain: I have been asked to reply.

Thirteen states have provided investigative teams including forensic experts to assist the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in Kosovo, although forensic investigations have now been scaled down with the onset of winter. They are: the UK, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. The UK was the first

to send such a team. ICTY also has its own team of investigators including forensic experts working in Bosnia.

Kosovo

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what organisation is responsible for reporting on numbers of bodies found in graves in Kosovo and on evidence of war crimes committed; when it will report and to whom. [96098]

Mr. Hain: I have been asked to reply.

There is no one organisation responsible for reporting on atrocities in Kosovo. However, the UN Commission for Human Rights has asked the UN High Commissioner to report on atrocities. She has produced two reports in May and September of this year.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many bodies were exhumed from the Trepca mine in Kosovo; and what forensic evidence was found that could prove claims that the Trepca mine had been a mass grave. [96096]

Mr. Hain: I have been asked to reply.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has conducted extensive investigations at Trepca mine. No bodies have been found there to date. There is no forensic evidence to date to confirm that it was a mass grave site.

Ascension Island

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what efforts he has made to attract civilian airlines to use Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island; and if he will make a statement. [96035]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

Civil aircraft may use Wideawake Airfield only with the agreement of both the UK and US authorities.

In December 1998, the UK passed to the United States authorities for consideration, a draft treaty to allow certain types of civil flights into Ascension.

During the visit of my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to the United States on 4–5 October 1999, the United States Government agreed in principle that the airfield should be opened to certain types of civil flights on a limited basis.

We are encouraging the United States authorities to complete their internal discussions and to secure a mandate for formal negotiations to begin. British Embassy officials in Washington will soon meet State Department officials to take this issue forward.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Archaeology (Funding)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on his policy towards funding of archaeology; what *(a)* national and *(b)* EC grants are available; and if he will make a statement. [95299]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Funding for archaeological projects is provided through English Heritage's (EH) archaeology budget (£9.7 million for 1999–2000), of which £4.975 million is provided in grants to outside bodies; archaeology will also feature in other EH funded projects. Developers' contribution to archaeological costs is estimated at £30 million per annum. Although the Local Government Finance Settlement is the best one for seven years, the provision of conservation services in local authorities is kept under review, and, where necessary, EH will continue to fund a number of archaeological posts (costing £150,000 in 1999–2000). Financial assistance has been available from the EU's Raphael fund, which is due to be replaced by the Culture 2000 Framework Programme, under which archaeological projects will be eligible; projects may also qualify for funding under a range of other EU programmes.

HMG is also funding a two-year project of pilot schemes in six areas of England for the voluntary recording of all archaeological finds, which started in September 1997. The Heritage Lottery Fund is funding a further six pilot schemes from early 1999, extending coverage to more than half the country. An Annual Report and website were launched on 24 March.

Television News

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will instruct the ITC to obtain from ITV the latest figures showing *(a)* the change in the numbers watching news on Channel 3 since the abolition of News at Ten and *(b)* the change in the viewing numbers for the 10 to 10.30 p.m. weekday slot on Channel 3 since the abolition of News at Ten. [95751]

Janet Anderson: The Independent Television Commission is monitoring the performance of ITV following changes to its news provision. ITV began their new evening schedule on 8 March, replacing the bulletin at 5.40–6.00 and News at Ten with a half hour news bulletin from 6.30–7.00 and an update from 11.00–11.15. For the four weeks beginning 14 September, the latest figures available to the ITC, the average audiences who were watching news on Channel 3 and the figures for the equivalent weeks in 1999 are as follows:

	Million
1998	
5.40–6.00	4.1
10.00–10.30	5.6
Total	9.7
1999	
6.30–7.00	5.5
11.00–11.15	3.5
Total	9.0

During this period in 1998, 5.6 million were watching Channel 3 in the 10.00 to 10.30 pm slot and during the same period in 1999, since the rescheduling of News at Ten, this has changed to 6.8 million.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what was the change in the total number of jobs in tourism-related industries in the year to December 1998 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; [95435]

(2) what was the change in the total number of jobs in tourism-related industries in the year to December 1998 in *(a)* London and *(b)* the north-west of England. [95926]

Janet Anderson: The changes in the number of self-employment and employee jobs in the tourism related industries in the year to December 1998 in (a) England, (b) Scotland, (c) Wales, (d) Northern Ireland, (e) London and (f) north-west England are shown in the table.

Region	*December 1997*	*December 1998*	*Change over the year (%)*
England	1,510,000	1,481,000	−2
Scotland	170,000	171,000	+0.06
Wales	79,000	82,000	+4
Northern Ireland	43,000	44,000	+2
London	276,000	275,000	−0.4
North West	186,000	183,000	−2

Source:

GB: Employee jobs from Annual Employment Survey and Short Term Employment Survey and self employment jobs from Labour Force Survey (ONS)

NI: Employee jobs from Northern Ireland Quarterly Employment Survey and self employment jobs from the NI Labour Force Survey (Northern Ireland Office)

Due to the level of detail required, the self-employment figures are for the winter period of December to February, and therefore do not directly match the reference period for employee jobs (of December).

Analogue Radio Frequencies

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with *(a)* commercial radio broadcasters, *(b)* the BBC and *(c)* consumer groups regarding the future of analogue radio frequencies. [95126]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* With the collaboration of the DTI's Radiocommunications Agency, my officials are considering the current use of analogue radio frequencies and the scope for new services. Representatives of the commercial radio broadcasters, the Radio Authority, the BBC and the Community Media Association have been invited to participate. One of the key requirements of the licensing process is for applicants to demonstrate consumer need within the licence area and consumer interests will be an important part of our policy consideration. We shall ensure that consumer needs are properly addressed in this review.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94978]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its PSA, and the measures of success it will use in the Output and Performance Analyses (OPA) published in March this year. Performance targets, where appropriate, have also been set for the Department's NDPBs and its agency through the production of annual funding agreements. These agreements have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. Information on targets and their delivery can also be found in the annual reports and accounts of the agency and non-departmental public bodies. The high level targets which appear in funding agreements, the PSA and the OPA are supported at operational level by numerous targets to ensure delivery by individual units. Listing these operational targets would be inappropriate and disproportionate in terms of resources.

Broadcasting Standards

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on his policy on standards in radio broadcasting. [96605]

Janet Anderson: Responsibility for the content of radio services rests with the BBC and the independent broadcasters. The BBC operates within the terms of its Charter and Agreement and undertakes to provide services which are of high general standards in all respects. Independent radio services are licensed and regulated by the Radio Authority under the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996. The Authority is under a general duty to facilitate the provision of licensed services which (taken as a whole) are of high quality and offer a wide range of programmes calculated to appeal to a variety of tastes and interests.

The Broadcasting Standards Commission is responsible under the Broadcasting Act 1996 for producing codes of practice relating to standards and fairness in programmes, considering and adjudicating on complaints and monitoring, researching and reporting on standards and fairness in broadcasting. The BBC and Radio Authority are required, when drawing up or revising their own codes relating to principles and practice, to reflect the general effect of the Broadcasting Standards Commission's codes.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if an action plan for increasing the representation of women in public life has been *(a)* prepared by her Department and *(b)* published since November 1998. [94848]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 682.

China

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made by the World Bank in implementing the China western poverty reduction scheme. [95291]

Clare Short: An Inspection Panel has just returned from China after conducting an investigation into whether the World Bank violated policies and procedures with regard to the design and appraisal of the Western Poverty Reduction Project. It will now prepare a detailed report for submission to World Bank management. It is anticipated that the report, and the management response to it, will be presented to the Executive Board of the World Bank in February 2000. No disbursement of funding on the Qinghai component of the project will take place until this has happened.

Departmental Twinning

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many requests there have been to her Department for placement of officials from Central, East European and CIS states as twins of his officials; how many such officials have been accepted as twins; and from which countries *(a)* those who were accepted and *(b)* those who were not accepted came. [94005]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *739*, by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz).

Health Projects

Ms McCafferty: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received on the reduction in the percentage of Government contributions to sexual and reproductive health projects under the new Civil Society Challenge Fund rules. [96515]

Clare Short: We have received a number of representations about the funding arrangements for reproductive health activities under the new Civil Society Challenge Fund (CSCF).

In the spirit of a Challenge Fund, it is important that all our partners demonstrate their commitment and the quality of their projects by raising funds within their own support based or from other donors. However, in recognition of the initial problems likely to be faced by organisations which had access to 100 per cent. funding from the JFS, I have agreed a transitional arrangement under which reproductive health activities will be eligible for 85 per cent. funding in year one of the new Fund, 70 per cent. in year two, and 50 per cent. in year three.

Ms McCafferty: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the non-Governmental organisations which are receiving 100 per cent. funding for population and reproductive health projects in 1999–2000 through the joint funding scheme. [96514]

Clare Short: Eleven NGOs are in receipt of 100 per cent. funding for population, reproductive and sexual health projects from the Joint Funding Scheme in the current financial year:

Alternative for India Development
AMREF (Africa Medical and Research Foundation)
CARE International (UK)
ICR (International Care and Relief)
International Family Health
Marie Stopes International
The Naz Foundation
Plan International
Population Concern
Population Services International
Urban Aid

Democratic Republic of Congo

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the level of UK aid is to the Democratic Republic of Congo in the current financial year; and if she will make a statement. [96708]

Clare Short: We hope that the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, which came into effect on 1 September, will bring an end to a war that has caused untold suffering and damage to the region. We continue to urge all parties to implement the agreement in full, but the onus of implementation lies with the parties themselves.

We and our EU partners have made clear our readiness to help with rebuilding the country, providing there is tangible progress towards respect for human rights, democracy, economic reform and the rule of law. Britain was the first bilateral donor to pledge support to a World Bank managed Trust Fund intended to focus on immediate reconstruction and rehabilitation following the fall of President Mobutu. The conflict has diverted attention away from the key task of establishing the essential economic and governance reforms necessary for utilisation of the Trust Fund. It is vital that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo use the opportunity of the Lusaka Agreement to focus on these issues.

In the meantime, the UK is responding to demonstrable humanitarian needs where access and security allow. So far this financial year, we have committed over £1.1 million to help both the most vulnerable groups within the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the refugee populations in the surrounding countries.

Bermuda

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the level of UK aid to Bermuda is in the current financial year; and if she will make a statement. [96707]

Clare Short: There are no plans for bilateral development assistance expenditure by my Department to Bermuda in the current financial year or thereafter.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Consumer White Paper

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *315*, if *The Times* industrial correspondent was briefed prior to the general press briefing at 12 noon on 22 July 1999. [94302]

Dr. Howells: Neither I nor my colleagues spoke to *The Times* industrial correspondent prior to the general press briefing on 22 July.

Philippines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if offsetting arrangements were associated with UK defence sales to the Philippines in the mid-1990s. [94802]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have been asked to reply.

Offset arrangements have been associated with UK defence exports to the Philippines. Such arrangements are a matter between the contractor(s) and the Philippine Government.

European State Aid

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions United Kingdom representatives have held with Commission officials over whether to categorise French Government assistance to the Société Marseillaise de Crédit as state aid; and if he will make a statement. [95297]

Mrs. Liddell: The Commission has exclusive competence to determine whether an aid is compatible with the Treaty. The Commission is currently investigating the aid granted to Société Marseillaise de Crédit. If, at the end of its investigation, the Commission reaches a negative decision and finds that the aid is not compatible with the Treaty, it may order the French authorities to recover the aid paid with interest. UK representatives have not held any discussions with Commission officials regarding this case.

Brussels Convention

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his policy is regarding the proposed revision of the Brussels Convention regarding cross-border consumer contract law; and if he will make a statement. [95923]

Dr. Howells: The Department is consulting business, consumer and other organisations about the approach the Government should take towards the draft proposal put forward by the European Commission to convert the Convention into a Community Regulation. The DTI hosted a conference for this purpose on 15 October. We are extremely keen to see e-commerce flourish in the EU and our aims are to give consumers confidence and to minimise costs to business.

Alcohol (Advertising)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his policy is regarding the advertising of alcoholic drinks; and if he will make a statement. [95925]

Dr. Howells: Alcohol advertising is subject to general legislation and other rules relating, for example, to accuracy, truthfulness and decency. In addition, there are specific rules relating to alcohol in the Codes of Practice of the principal bodies controlling advertising in the UK: the Independent Television Commission; the Radio Authority; and the Advertising Standards Authority. These rules are designed to ensure that alcohol advertising is socially responsible. Advertisements should not appeal to young people, should not show alcohol in association with dangerous activities such as driving, sports or operating machinery, and should not give the impression that alcohol improves performance.

In addition, television advertising is also subject to a European Union Directive. Article 15 of the Television Without Frontiers Directive requires that television advertising for alcoholic drinks must not be aimed specifically at minors or depict minors consuming them. The regulators have reflected this in their Codes of Practice by specifically prohibiting advertisers from directing promotions for drinks containing alcohol at people under eighteen years of age.

I understand that compliance with the Codes in this area is very high. Relatively few complaints are received about alcohol advertising and we have no reason to believe the system is not working well across the media. My colleagues in the Department of Health are examining the role of advertising in the context of the development of the new alcohol misuse strategy for England.

Scientific Researchers

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will publish the results of the Office of Science and Technology studies into the careers, conditions and salaries of young scientific researchers. [95796]

Ms Hewitt: The Office of Science and Technology has not commissioned such studies. It supports the Research Careers Initiative, chaired by Sir Gareth Roberts, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield, which expects to publish a second report in the new year, surveying progress in improving the career management and development of research staff on fixed-term contracts in universities.

The first report, from October 1998, is available on the CVCP website at: www.cvcp.ac.uk.

Working Time Regulations

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the level of compliance by employers with the new Working Time Regulations. [95696]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* The level of compliance with the Working Time Regulations is difficult to assess at this early stage. When the autumn Labour Force Survey is available (early in 2000) it will provide information for some assessment of

the Regulations to be made. The enforcing authorities are also collecting data, which may be indicative of compliance.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to amend the Working Time Regulations in respect of *(a)* record-keeping by those who opt out of the 48-hour week and *(b)* extending the scope of the unmeasured working time exemption; and if he will make a statement. [96700]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Draft regulations to amend the Working Time Regulations, in respect of the requirement to keep records for workers who have opted out of the working time limit and extending the scope of the unmeasured working time exemption, were laid before Parliament on 19 October. They will be debated in both Houses before being made.

The extension of the 'unmeasured working time' derogation provides greater flexibility for workers who can determine their own hours of work, but have an element of their working time predetermined. The second amendment replaces the requirement to keep records for those who opt-out of the working time limit, with a single requirement to keep a list of those who have signed an opt-out.

Electrical Installations

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of installing residual current devices on the incidence of fires in domestic dwellings with an electrical cause. [95265]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The DTI has made no formal assessment of the impact of installing residual current devices (RCDs) on the incidence of fires in domestic dwellings with an electrical cause.

However, the Department has undertaken research into the role and added value of RCDs in the home, including an examination of their potential for preventing fires. The report was published in October 1997 and the contractor was ERA Technology Ltd. A copy of the report "Residual Current Devices—added value for home safety" is available in the Library.

Defence Trade

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the amount *(a)* in total and *(b)* by country of the five nations with the highest amount of such trade, of UK (i) imports and (ii) exports of defence goods and services for the past two years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [95932]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* Information on exports of military equipment during 1997 was included in the Government's Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 25 March 1999. Information for 1998 will be included in the Government's next Annual Report which is currently being prepared.

Figures for exports of goods prior to 1997, imports of goods and trade in services could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Millennium Trade Round

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are Her Majesty's Government's priorities at the Millennium Round of the World Trade Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [95729]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The Government's priorities are unchanged from those outlined in the reply given by my predecessor on 21 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *548–49*.

Trade Schemes Regulations

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which EU legislation required the introduction of the Trading Schemes (Exclusion) (Amendment) Regulations 1997/1887. [96204]

Dr. Howells: There is no such EU legislation.

Business Links

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of Business Links. [96203]

Ms Hewitt: The Small Business Service will develop a network of local Business Link franchises. Key stakeholders involved in existing Business Link local partnerships will be invited to submit proposals to deliver high quality coherent services under the new franchise arrangements. The number of local Business Link areas will be reduced from 81 to 45.

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria will be used in determining Business Link boundaries. [96324]

Ms Hewitt: On 30 June, a public consultation on the Small Business Service was launched. The Small Business Service will be given responsibility for taking forward the Business Link network.

In a letter to RDA Chairs in June, RDAs were asked to consult local partners and make recommendations on the boundaries for local delivery of SBS services. The letter also set out the criteria for determining these boundaries. The underlying principle for determining SBS boundaries was the desire to have no more than 40–50. This would maximise administrative savings and provide a more effective local network for planning, funding, managing and driving up quality, while still ensuring that businesses would have good access locally to business support services.

Specifically, RDAs were asked to ensure that boundaries:

fit with local travel-to-work and travel-to-study patterns and with the pattern of business and commercial activities;

be co-terminous with the Learning and Skills Council areas and other key local economic or social units and partnerships—especially with local authorities, the sub-regional partnerships set up locally to tackle economic and social issues, and be within RDA/GO boundaries; and

be large enough to assure economies of scale and cost effectiveness—a resident population of 0.5 million is considered to be the minimum—although it is expected to be much greater in conurbations.

Ministers subsequently made it clear to RDAs that they wished LSC/SBS boundaries not to cut across LEA boundaries.

Ministers considered RDA recommendations in detail, alongside the criteria set in the letter to RDA Chairs and with advice from the relevant Government Offices. They also considered a number of direct representations from interested parties. The decisions were announced to the House on 28 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns *936–38*.

Robert Maxwell

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will be in a position to publish the results of the inquiry into Robert Maxwell. [96254]

Dr. Howells: The independent inspectors appointed to investigate the affairs and membership of Mirror Group Newspapers plc (there is no inquiry into the late Robert Maxwell) are still carrying out their work. Consequently they have yet to report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Dismissal of Workers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce measures in his proposed employment relations legislation to prevent the dismissal of employees involved in a lawful strike. [96173]

Mr. Alan Johnson: We intend to bring section 16 and Schedule 5 of the Employment Relations Act 1999 into force by Easter next year. These provisions will extend the right of protection for those dismissed for taking lawfully organised industrial action to complain to a tribunal of unfair dismissal. They will make it automatically unfair to dismiss workers for the first eight weeks of the action and give employees a right to claim unfair dismissal, if dismissed after the eight week period, where the employer has failed to follow all reasonable procedural steps to try to resolve the dispute. These provisions are designed to stop precipitate dismissals and to place an onus on both employers and unions to settle disputes by negotiation.

Nuclear Fusion

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports he has received on progress towards nuclear fusion at the USA National Ignition Facility at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories in California. [96435]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department's contribution on nuclear fusion is managed and undertaken by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA).

UKAEA has received no reports on progress towards nuclear fusion at the USA National Ignition Facility at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories, California, other than those presented at international fusion conferences and meetings, and reports in the scientific press.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contributions his Department is making to nuclear fusion projects in the USA and Europe; and where they are taking place. [96434]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department's contribution on nuclear fusion is managed and undertaken by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). UK contribution for fusion projects in Europe (including UK) is split into two parts:

the UKAEA expenditure of £14.6 million per year, including their contribution of 8 Million Euro per year as host to the Joint European Torus (JET), an EU Joint Undertaking based at Culham, Oxfordshire;

the UK's contribution to the European Union R&D Framework Programme supporting the European fusion collaboration.

No contribution is made by my Department to fusion projects in the USA.

Export Credit Guarantees

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which countries currently qualify for ECGD cover. [96323]

Mr. Caborn: This information is in the public domain, published in the Autumn 1999 issue of 'ECGD News'. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in each of the last five years, how much the Treasury has had to make available to ECGD to cover losses incurred by the ECGD. [96562]

Mr. Caborn: Over the last five years, cash-flow on ECGD's trading operations has been positive:

£ million

Financial year	*Cash-flow*
1994–95	–8.1
1995–96	245.9
1996–97	444.9
1997–98	442.6
1998–99	353.5

As a result, over this period, ECGD has not been a charge on the Exchequer and has contributed £1.5 billion to it.

Radio Frequencies

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much revenue Her Majesty's Government have raised in selling radio wave frequencies since May 1997. [96402]

Ms Hewitt: The Wireless Telegraphy Acts 1949 and 1998 provide for licences to be issued to establish or use stations for wireless telegraphy and to install or use wireless telegraphy apparatus. Fee income from such licences, other than for television reception, totalled £92.571m over the two financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Letter Stamps (Europe)

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the percentage increase in the cost

of a letter stamp for Europe in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* 1999; what were his reasons for authorising the increases; and if he will make a statement. [96486]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The cost of a stamp for a letter up to 20g to European destinations rose by an average of 4.8 per cent. on 6 April 1998 and by a further 13.33 per cent. on 25 October 1999. It is still one of the cheapest rates in Europe.

The increase was prompted by increasing handling costs and is in line with the agreement, set out in the European Postal Services Directive, that prices should be geared to costs. The increases were introduced by the Post Office following consultation with the Post Office Users' National Council (POUNC).

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress towards issuing licences for third generation mobile spectrum under the Wireless Telegraphy Acts 1949 and 1998. [96905]

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted to announce that the Information Memorandum for the auction of licences for Third Generation mobile spectrum is being published today.

The Memorandum sets out the detailed arrangements for the auction. Applications to take part in the auction are scheduled to be due on 12 January 2000. The auction itself is expected to start in March 2000. The Government expect that this will be the first auction for Third Generation licences in Europe, giving UK consumers early access to this exciting new technology, and keeping the UK at the forefront of international developments in mobile communications.

I am pleased that Vodafone's and BT Cellnet's Telecommunications Act Licences were modified by consent on 22 October to provide for the negotiation of roaming agreements with any new entrants. This will help to encourage market entry and competition, so benefiting consumers.

A copy of the Information Memorandum is being placed in the Library of the House and on the auction website at www.spectrumauctions.gov.uk.

Inward Investment

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total value of inward investment into *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the area covered by the Government Office for the North East in each year since 1995. [96732]

Mr. Caborn: The following table shows the total value of the stock of inward investment into the UK for the years 1995 to 1997, the latest year for which information is available. Figures are not available for foreign investment by region.

Total stock of UK inward

	£ million
1995	128,885
1996	134,654
1997	156,969

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Electronic Communication Costs

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the comparative costs to SME's of 2 megabite electronic communications between central London and *(a)* outer London and *(b)* areas around London. [96657]

Ms Hewitt: Several companies compete in the provision of high capacity telecommunications links in the central London area.

The price which SMEs will pay for high capacity links will vary according to their length and the choice of supplier.

The Government are committed to extending competition in high bandwidth communications as the best means of increasing choice to business and residential consumers.

Combined Heat and Power Stations

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many consents to build combined heat and power stations since *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* June 1998 have been received; and how many have been refused consent. [96890]

Mrs. Liddell: This Government have always recognised the environmental and other benefits of combined heat and power. Since May 1997, 17 proposals for combined heat and power schemes have been considered by this Government and all have received clearance.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Oral Statements

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the reports published by his Department and its associated bodies, *(b)* the reports received from bodies set up by his Department, *(c)* the decisions his Department has taken and *(d)* events in the UK and elsewhere, since 27 July, which satisfied the criteria he uses for deciding whether to apply to make oral statements to the House when the House is sitting. [93967]

Mr. Hain: I refer to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council on 19 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns *429–30*.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those occasions when the Treaty of Rome has been *(a)* renegotiated and *(b)* amended. [95500]

Mr. Vaz: Renegotiation is necessary before any treaty amendment can be made. The Treaty of Rome has been amended on the following occasions:

Merger Treaty 1967
Treaty amending Certain Budgetary Provisions 1971
Treaty amending Certain Financial Provisions 1977
Greenland Treaty 1985
Single European Act 1986
Treaty on European Union 1992
Treaty of Amsterdam 1997

The Treaty has also been amended as a result of the accession of new member states. This happened in 1973, 1981, 1986 and 1995.

"Becoming Europeans" Conference

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the *(a)* nature and *(b)* cost of Government support to the Becoming Europeans Conference at Castel Gandolfo; and if he will place the papers presented by representatives of the Government there, in the Library. [95406]

Mr. Vaz: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office contributed £10,000 to support the Becoming Europeans Conference held in Castel Gandolfo near Rome, 14–17 October 1999, to cover transport costs, conference organisation and documentation. The British Council provided organisational support. There was also commercial sponsorship. The conference took the form of informal discussions rather than set piece speeches; the aim was an exchange of ideas. There are no records of individual contributions. A copy of the conference report will be placed in the Library as soon as it is published.

Echelon System

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on civil liberties of the Echelon system; [96547]

(2) if he will make a statement on the purpose of the Echelon system. [96548]

Mr. Robin Cook: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, it is long-standing practice not to respond to speculation on alleged intelligence operations.

Chinese State Visit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact representatives from his Department had with police responsible for policing the visit by the Chinese President; on how many occasions; when; if the treatment of protesters was discussed; and if he will make a statement. [96502]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *993*.

Departmental Asset Sales

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of assets sold by his Department and their value, item by item, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99 and an estimate of the value of asset sales planned for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [96298]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the late Derek Fatchett to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), on 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *741*, in which sales of FCO property from 1 April 1997 to date are listed. The remainder of the information requested is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member with further information in due course.

Montenegro

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the policy of Her Majesty's Government are towards Montenegrin aspirations for more independence from Serbia. [96495]

Mr. Vaz: We hope that an acceptable compromise can be reached between Montenegro and Serbia which addresses Montenegro's legitimate aspirations. Clearly it is more likely that negotiations will succeed when President Milosevic's regime has been replaced by democratic government in Serbia.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government are making contingency plans for intervention in Montenegro if steps towards independence are violently opposed by Serbia. [96494]

Mr. Vaz: We conduct contingency planning on a worldwide basis. It is not our policy to discuss individual contingency plans.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94980]

Mr. Hain: The Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its PSA, and the measures of success it will use in the Output and Performance Analysis (OPA) published in March this year. The Department's PSA targets also refer to the British Council and the BBC World Service. The Department has adopted the Service First initiative and provides regular performance reports on the Modernising Government Action Plan, published in July 1999. The Department publishes information on its progress towards meeting its objectives in its annual Departmental Report. Reflecting our commitment to an increasing use of new technologies, the report can be found on our award-winning internet site.

These high-level targets are supported at operational level by numerous targets to ensure delivery by individual units. Listing these targets would be disproportionate in terms of resources.

Bermuda

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the United Kingdom gives the Island of Bermuda to help them with air sea rescue, drugs enforcement and shipping control; and if he will make a statement. [96706]

Mr. Battle: The UK stands ready to provide technical advice and assistance to Bermuda when necessary. The British Maritime and Coastguard Agency provides air/sea rescue training to Bermuda. Bermuda has access to a British Drugs Liaison Officer (DLO) based in New York and is included in regional drug operations. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency also provides advice and training where required to the Bermudian administration to assist it in fulfilling its obligations under relevant international maritime conventions.

Duma Elections

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to provide monitors from the United Kingdom of the Russian Federation's Duma elections on 19 December. [96331]

Mr. Vaz: We are currently making plans to send a delegation of 35 short-term observers and three long-term observers to monitor the Duma elections. This delegation makes up roughly 10 per cent. of the monitoring mission organised by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Ukraine Elections

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will monitor the elections in the Ukraine on 31 October from the United Kingdom. [96330]

Mr. Vaz: At the invitation of the Ukrainian Government, an official election monitoring mission is being carried out by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We have funded the Head and Deputy Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Mission. In addition, we have funded the participation of two long-term and 20 short-term monitors for the first round of voting on 31 October. The United Kingdom will fund the continued participation of 11 monitors in the event of a second round of voting. Around 10 members of the British Embassy in Kiev, as well as visiting staff from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, are also accredited as official election monitors and will coordinate their activities with the OSCE/ODIHR Mission. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Ms Jones) will participate in monitoring as a member of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that companies involved in the production of genetically modified foods do not disadvantage farmers in the world's poorest countries; and if he will make a statement. [96604]

Mr. Hain: We wish to see the benefits available from genetic modification spread equitably, in ways that support sustainable development, help to eliminate poverty, and do not pose unacceptable risks to health or the environment. We are working to develop appropriate international frameworks: in particular to agree a Biosafety Protocol regulating movements of living modified organisms; and to promote an internationally agreed Code of Responsible Behaviour in the development, testing and release of GMOs. The Department for International Development has published a briefing document setting out how it reflects these aims in the support it provides for sustainable agriculture in developing countries.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were recruited to full-time membership of the RUC for the calendar years 1996, 1997 and 1998; what was the perceived religious/community origin of the intake in each year; and what percentage of the intake each year had previously served as members of *(a)* the RUC Reserve and *(b)* HM armed forces. [94658]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The following table shows the number of recruits to the RUC for the years 1996, 1997 and 1998, their perceived religious/community origin and the percentage previously members of the RUC Reserve. It has not been possible within the timescales to show the number who previously had served in HM Forces but this information will be sent to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Year	*Perceived Protestant*	*Perceived Roman Catholic*	*Not known*	*Total*	*Percentage formally RUCR*
1996	172	36	18	226	45
1997	242	28	17	287	51
1998	140	22	17	179	39

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the staffing levels of the RUC in September (i) in total and (ii) broken down by *(a)* gender, *(b)* perceived religious/community origin and *(c)* numbers and percentages of full-time, reserve full-time and reserve part-time staff; and what were the changes in composition over the past five years. [94656]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The tables show the staffing levels of the RUC in September 1999 and 1994 broken down by perceived religious/community origin and gender.

RUC strength 1999 (September)—perceived religious composition

Staff	Perceived Protestant	Perceived Roman Catholic	Not known	Total	Percentage perceived Protestant	Percentage perceived Roman Catholic
Regulars	7,525	716	284	8,525	88.27	8.40
Full-time Reserve	2,442	194	160	2,796	87.34	6.94
Part-time Reserve	1,121	57	15	1,193	93.96	4.78
Total	11,088	967	459	12,514	88.60	7.73

RUC strength 1999 (September)—by gender

Staff	Male	Female	Percentage female
Regulars	7,533	992	11.64
Full-time Reserve	2,544	252	9.01
Part-time Reserve	775	418	35.04
Total	10,852	1,662	13.28

RUC strength 1994 (end of year)—perceived religious composition

Staff	Perceived Protestant	Perceived Roman Catholic	Not known	Total	Percentage perceived Protestant	Percentage perceived Roman Catholic
Regulars	7,578	660	256	8,494	89.21	7.77
Full-time Reserve	2,823	206	168	3,197	88.30	6.44
Part-time Reserve	1,403	67	20	1,490	94.16	4.50
Total	11,804	933	444	13,181	89.50	7.08

RUC strength 1994 (end of year)—by gender

Staff	Male	Female	Percentage female
Regulars	7,640	854	10.05
Full-time Reserve	3,054	143	4.47
Part-time Reserve	995	495	33.22
Total	11,689	1,492	11.32

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in each rank in order the numbers and perceived religious/community origin of RUC officers. [94659]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The following table shows the number of officers in the RUC by rank and perceived religious/community origin:

Rank	Perceived Protestant	Perceived Roman Catholic	Not known	Total
Senior Officers	8	0	2	10
Chief Superintendent	33	6	0	39
Superintendent	102	21	2	125
Chief Inspector	154	15	4	173
Inspector	430	53	15	498
Sergeant	1,262	113	24	1,399
Constable	5,526	507	238	6,271
Total	7,515	715	285	8,515
Full-time reserve	2,414	191	157	2,762
Part-time reserve	1,115	57	15	1,187

Threats (Antrim)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what reports he has received about threats made to a woman and her husband that forced them to leave the Antrim area on 23 May; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of these threats; what is the present stage of the police investigation. [94490]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* I am advised that there is insufficient detail in this question for the police to accurately check their records. Perhaps my hon. Friend can provide me with more precise information.

Stone Throwing Attacks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the RUC took following the stone-throwing attack on an East Antrim councillor on 18 May; what injuries were caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; what other attacks took place in that area at that time; and what is the present stage of the police investigation. [94486]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* I am advised that there is insufficient detail in this question for the police to accurately check their records. Perhaps my hon. Friend can provide me with more precise information.

Public Bodies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in order of their publication dates in the last calendar year those public bodies that are required to lay their annual report and accounts before the House and indicate those reports that are available through the Vote Office. [94655]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments for the 1998 calendar year is as follows:

Public body	*Publication date*
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	2 April 1998
Independent Commission for Police Complaints	28 April 1998
Fisheries Conservancy Board	6 July 1998
Northern Ireland Health & Social Services Estates Agency	20 July 1998
Social Security Agency	21 July 1998
Industrial Research & Technology Unit	23 July 1998
Compensation Agency	27 July 1998
Child Support Agency	29 July 1998
Training & Employment Agency	29 July 1998
Foyle Fisheries Commission	4 August 1998
Equal Opportunities Commission (Northern Ireland)	15 October 1998
Commission for Racial Equality (Northern Ireland)	22 October 1998
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Northern Ireland	27 October 1998
Fair Employment Commission (Northern Ireland)	5 November 1998
Education and Library Boards	18 November 1998
Arts Council (Lottery activities)	20 November 1998
Sports Council (Lottery activities)	24 November 1998
Police Authority for Northern Ireland	30 November 1998

The Vote Office stocks all parliamentary papers and can also obtain other publications for Members of Parliament.

RUC (Equal Opportunities Unit)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when was the last inspection of the RUC Equal Opportunities Unit by HM Inspector of Constabulary; what were its findings; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [94660]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The Equal Opportunities Unit was last inspected by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary as part of the 1998–99 inspection of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Sections 3.73 to 3.81 of the Report refer. A copy was placed in the Library on 23 July 1999.

RUC (Portadown)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the role of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints in relation to the investigation by the Royal Ulster Constabulary into whether officers present when Robert Hamill and Gregory Girvan were assaulted in Portadown town centre on 27 April 1997 will be subject to disciplinary charges. [95359]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The role of the ICPC is as laid down in Part II of the Police (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. In the particular cases of the assaults on Robert Hamill and Gregory Girvan, the ICPC is currently supervising the police investigation of disciplinary matters arising from a complaint relating to the conduct of police in Portadown on 27 April 1997. When the disciplinary investigation report is submitted the Commission will issue a statement as to whether or not the investigation was conducted to its satisfaction. Following this, the Chief Constable will inform the Commission of his opinion in relation to the preferring of charges. At that juncture, the Commission will review all the evidential documentation and decide whether or not the bringing of disciplinary charges is warranted.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will identify *(a)* by rank and *(b)* by perceived religious/community origin, the officers employed within Portadown sub-division of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. [95361]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The RUC have advised that officers of the following ranks served in Portadown Sub-Division at 1 July 1999:

Rank	*Number*
Superintendent and above	12
Chief Inspector	7
Inspector	21
Sergeant	55
Constable	263
Total	358

The perceived religious/community origin is 319 perceived Protestant, 28 perceived Roman Catholic and 11 undetermined.

Macpherson Report

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Efford), on 19 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *468*, what has been the outcome of the examination of the recommendations in the Lawrence report and what measures have been adopted to promote racial, religious, sex and disability equality. [95350]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* As I said in an earlier reply, the terms of reference of the Review of Criminal Justice and the Patten Report cover areas highlighted by the report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The Criminal Justice Review team is due to report shortly and the Government are currently consulting on the recommendations of the independent Commission on Policing as required by the Good Friday Agreement. The Government will be making a statement

on the outcome of consultation on the Patten report, "A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland", after that consultation is complete.

The Government remain committed to the principles of equality of treatment, respect for human rights and different cultures as fundamental elements of policing in Northern Ireland. Since April the Government have announced a number of significant measures. For example, the new Equality Commission for Northern Ireland was established on 1 October and the appointment of Mrs. O'Loan as Police Ombudsman Designate was announced on 11 October.

The report of the working group considering the treatment of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses in the criminal justice system was published in July. The group endorsed the recommendations made by a similar working group in England and Wales. In particular they recommended, and I agreed, that the provisions in the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, which relate to such witnesses, should be extended to Northern Ireland by means of Order in Council. This has now been done. The group is continuing to meet to oversee implementation of its recommendations.

Following the Report the Deputy Chief Constable of the RUC has taken responsibility for co-ordinating activities and action plans are being introduced. A Positive Action Team has been set up to progress ethnic minority recruitment. All probationers complete a Police Community Relations module dealing with equality and race relations legislation, human rights and harassment. Officers receive local training on how to respond effectively and sensitively to racial incidents. Family Liaison Officers have been established force-wide.

Local Community Affairs officers monitor racially motivated incidents as defined in the Lawrence Report. Community Affairs Branch in partnership with the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities supported by the Commission for Racial Equality have set up a Community and Police Liaison Committee with ethnic minority organisations. Contact has been established with the Chinese Welfare Association and a crime desk set up at the Indian Community Centre.

RUC (Guidelines)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance is issued to Royal Ulster Constabulary officers on the circumstances in which the assistance of Army units should be sought in dealing with public order problems; and whether a copy of such guidance will be placed in the Library. [95364]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* Guidance is reviewed and issued annually in a Force Policy document. This is a confidential operational policing manual and it would therefore be inappropriate to place a copy in the Library.

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many families have left their homes due to paramilitary intimidation in Northern Ireland *(a)* since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and *(b)* during 1999; and if he will make a statement. [95716]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The figures listed in the table are for people (owner-occupiers and tenants from both the private and social housing sectors) who have approached the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and have been awarded A1 status for reasons of sectarianism, terrorist intimidation or threat of intimidation. These cases would arise from a variety of sources, for example paramilitary feuds and alleged anti-social behaviour.

	Number
April to December 1998	253
January to 2 September 1999	300
Total	553

"Forced Upon Us"

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date the Northern Ireland Arts Council decided to withdraw funding from the Dubbeljoint/Just Us production of their play, "Forced Upon Us"; what reasons were given for this decision; on what date the theatre company was informed; if he will list the correspondence received by the Arts Council from the RUC, the Police Authority, and any other public authority in connection with this play; and if he will make a statement on freedom of expression and political vetting in the Arts. [95368]

Mr. McFall *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* I am advised by the Chief Executive of the Arts Council that the Artistic Director of Dubbeljoint Productions was informed in a letter of 28 June 1999 that Arts Council revenue funding for the production of "Forced Upon Us" was conditional upon receipt of a completed script which the Council could assess artistically. Two unfinished scripts which were received by the Arts Council on 24 June and 15 July 1999 fell well below the threshold of artistic acceptability in the opinion of the Council and its external assessors. The Council informed Dubbeljoint Productions and Just Us Community Theatre on 22 July 1999 that their script of "Forced Upon Us" fell well below the artistic standard which the Council expected from its clients and that no Council funding could be directed towards it production.

I am advised that no correspondence was received by the Arts Council from the RUC, the Police Authority or any other public authority in connection with "Forced Upon Us". The Arts Council of Northern Ireland operates at arm's length from Government and has complete independence in exercising its artistic judgment within available resources.

From the information available to me, I am satisfied that the Arts Council's decision to withhold funding from Dubbeljoint Productions for its production of "Forced Upon Us" was taken solely on artistic grounds and was not motivated by any political considerations. The Arts

Council and Dubbeljoint Productions issued a joint statement on 1 October 1999 indicating that the matter had been resolved to their mutual satisfaction.

Drug Tariff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure by the NHS on items in part IXB of the Drug Tariff in each year from 1988–89 to 1998–99, with such breakdown of the figures for each year to types of item as is available. [96080]

Mr. George Howarth: The information available is shown in the table. No information is available prior to 1992.

Total expenditure by the NHS on incontinence appliances is not available. The table shows the net ingredient cost of items that were dispensed in the community in Northern Ireland.

The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of an appliance and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income.

The net ingredient cost of incontinence appliances dispensed in the community

Net ingredient cost £

Incontinence appliances	*1992*	*1993*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Incontinence sheaths	171,020.03	198,141.00	235,247.52	299,713.02	326,148.71	322,222.80	336,658.59
Leg bags	220,197.53	235,275.11	290,905.11	345,460.78	395,251.19	407,507.72	427,867.64
Night drainage bags	56,004.16	62,213.18	66,788.43	87,090.29	4,529.83	103,191.27	111,458.88
Suspensory systems	7.10	—	1,890.94	1,528.57	1,347.06	1,724.15	1,607.24
Tubing and accessories	—	—	2,833.32	4,988.12	4,567.92	5,921.02	12,144.10
Total	447,411	495,629	597,665	738,779	821,853	840,567	889,736

SOCIAL SECURITY

Appeals

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances claimants who submit an appeal against the loss of benefit may have their Income Support reduced because they have submitted such an appeal; and if he will make a statement. [94797]

Angela Eagle: There are no circumstances in which submitting an appeal leads directly to a reduction in Income Support.

However, where someone who is claiming benefit on grounds of incapacity for work fails the "all work test" and appeals this decision, then Income Support can be paid at a reduced rate until a final decision on the appeal is made. The reduction is equal to 20 per cent. of the appropriate personal allowance for a single person of their age. The reduction is made good in full if the appeal succeeds. Full benefit can be paid if the person concerned makes themselves available for work and claims Jobseeker's Allowance instead.

Income Support

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he proposes to encourage the take-up of Income Support unclaimed by those already in receipt of Incapacity Benefit but entitled to additional benefit. [95164]

Mr. Bayley: We want all of those entitled but not receiving their benefits to claim. Our current focus is on the most vulnerable group—those pensioners who live on incomes below the Minimum Income Guarantee. Research shows that this group is particularly resistant to claiming their entitlement and our priority is to overcome barriers and establish the most effective way of encouraging them to claim.

The new ONE service, which is currently being piloted, will improve the take-up of Income Support in appropriate cases by those claiming Incapacity Benefit. One of the major advantages of this new system is that, for the first time, there will be an holistic approach to the benefit requirements of working-age people. ONE will ensure that claimants receive appropriate advice at the first point of contact with the benefit system.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals are claiming Incapacity Benefit who have *(a)* an individual income and *(b)* a household income which is in excess of £400 a week before taking into account any benefits due to their disability. [95530]

Mr. Bayley: Data for 1997–98 suggest that there are 140,000 individuals in receipt of Incapacity Benefit with a household income over £400 a week, not including Incapacity Benefit, Disability Living Allowance or any other benefit awarded for incapacity or disability. The number with an individual income over £400 a week cannot be estimated reliably from the available data. Data also suggest that there are around 300,000 Incapacity Benefit households with a total income of more than £400 a week.

Notes:

1. Weekly household income in the unequivalised income, net of tax and other deductions of the household that the benefit recipient lives in less any benefits awarded on the grounds of incapacity or disability.

2. Weekly individual income is the income of the individual in receipt of Incapacity Benefit, less benefits awarded on the grounds of incapacity or disability.

3. All amounts are in April 1999 prices.

4. Figures are estimates taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data set that is based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland. 1997–98 is the latest year for which information is available.

Pensions

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide the basis of his Department's calculation that restoring the basic state pension link with earnings would cost £8 billion by 2010. [96105]

Mr. Rooker: The gross cost of increasing the basic State pension in line with earnings is calculated by the Government Actuary's Department to be £7.6 billion in 2010–11. An explanation of the method for calculating gross costs of the basic State pension is given in Appendix D (paragraphs 14.21 to 14.35), of the Government Actuary's Department publication "National Insurance Fund: Long Term Financial Estimates", (Cm 4406: July 1999), which is available in the Library. For the purposes of this costing, it is assumed that annual real earnings growth is 1.5 per cent. above price inflation.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will consider funding a one-off payment to pensioners of £50 in addition to the basic state pension on the occasion of the millennium. [96748]

Mr. Rooker: We have already increased the Winter Fuel Payment to £100 this year to ensure that today's pensioners do not have to worry about turning their heating up when it is cold because of the cost of their winter fuel bills.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *722*, concerning SERPS if he will update the figures with net cost *(a)* using the pensions model and *(b)* using the assumptions made in the answer to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) of 16 December 1998, *Official Report*, column *611*. [96677]

Mr. Rooker: Precise estimates of net costs using the pensions model are not available. For a delay in changes to inherited SERPS until 2010, income-related benefit savings are estimated to be in the range 0–5 per cent. of gross costs between 2000 and 2010, and 5–10 per cent. of gross costs between 2010 and 2020. A delay in changes until 2005 leads to estimated income-related benefit savings of the order of 0–5 per cent. of gross costs between 2000 and 2010, and between 5–15 per cent. of gross costs between 2010 and 2020.

Income-related benefit offsets based on the Family Resources Survey are not applicable as the latest model applies to the current year only.

Note:

Income-related benefit offsets are estimated using PENSIM, a dynamic simulation model that projects pensioners' incomes into the next century. PENSIM estimates are based on a number of economic and behavioral assumptions and show the broad order of magnitude of future changes—as such offset ratios should be viewed as indicative rather than definitive.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the estimated cost would be of *(a)* uprating the minimum income guarantee for pensioners in line with earnings, *(b)* uprating the minimum income guarantee in line with prices for pensioners under 85 years, and in line with earnings for those over 85 years, in (i) 2000–01, (ii) 2010–11, (iii) 2020–21 and (iv) 2030–31. [95535]

Mr. Rooker: No projections have been made of long-term expenditure on the Minimum Income Guarantee. The projected expenditure for 2000–01, as published in the Social security Departmental Report (Cm 4214) in March 1999, is based on an assumed uprating for all cases in line with average earnings, at an estimated cost of £155 million.

PENSIM, the Department's dynamic microsimulation model of pensioners' incomes, does project pensioners' income distribution under different policy scenarios up to 2025. However, it is not considered sufficiently accurate to be used as a forecasting model of absolute amounts of expenditure on the income-related benefits. Instead it is best used as a comparative model to assess the broad impact of different policy options on the distribution of pensioner's incomes over time.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures his Department is taking to raise public awareness about the minimum income guarantee for pensioners. [96684]

Mr. Rooker: We are particularly concerned about pensioners entitled to but not claiming the guarantee and we will make an announcement shortly on our plans to increase awareness and to tackle barriers to claiming.

Therapeutic Work

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the employed classification as that of people suffering from a severe disability who undertake limited work on medical advice, with the permission of the Benefits Agency. [96263]

Mr. Bayley: No such representations have been received.

Social Security regulations limit the circumstances in which people can work while maintaining entitlement to incapacity benefits but otherwise the status of that work is not a relevant consideration for benefit purposes.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the application of the minimum wage in respect of work used as therapy for people with severe disability. [96248]

Mr. Bayley: Entitlement to incapacity benefits is based on the fundamental principle that they are for people who are incapable of work because of sickness or disability. It is recognised that in some cases a limited amount of work can benefit a person's medical condition and may increase their prospects of a return to the labour market. A longstanding provision, known as the therapeutic work rule, allows benefit recipients to do some paid work on the advice of a doctor without it affecting their underlying entitlement. The work is subject to a weekly earnings limit. An hours limit of 16 hours a week also applies unless the work is done under medical supervision, as part of a hospital treatment programme, or in a sheltered workshop.

The application of the national minimum wage to this work is not a relevant consideration for benefit purposes. However, last April the earnings limit was increased from £48 to £58 to ensure that the hours limit was consistent with 16 hours work paid at the national minimum wage rate of £3.60 an hour (16 x £3.60 = £57.60).

Social Security Expenditure

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate of the all-items RPI to September 1999 underlay his projections of social security

expenditure for 2000–01; and by how much expenditure would be reduced if benefits were uprated by the actual inflation rate to September 1999. [96299]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The inflation assumptions underlying the Department's expenditure forecasts were set out on Page 89 of the Social Security Departmental Report (Cm 4214). The Report also makes clear that the forecast depended on a number of other assumptions. These include economic assumptions such as the rate of unemployment and the growth in earnings which underpins forecast spending on the Minimum Income Guarantee. It also takes account of Government policies already announced, such as above inflation rises in Child Benefit. The effect of a 1 per cent. variation for all benefits is around 830 million. This assumes that both the RPI and the Rossi index vary by the same amount.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Fisheries Policy (European Commission Questionnaire)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will deposit in the Library *(a)* a copy of the questionnaire distributed at the June 1998 Lisbon seminar at Expo 98 by the Director General of DG XIV, as indicated in OJ C182(/51) of 28 June, and *(b)* the Commission's scrutiny report on the same; and when the consultation procedure is to finish. [92856]

Mr. Morley: I am arranging for a copy of the European Commission questionnaire on the Common Fisheries Policy after 2002 to be placed in the Library, together with a copy of the Commission's analysis of replies to the questionnaire. The Commission's extensive programme of consultations with fishing and other interests ended in June this year.

Organic Farming

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance he will give to organic farmers who have already made the conversion from conventional to organic farming; what assessment he has made of the take-up of financial aid among organic farmers; what he is doing to ensure organic farmers know what aid is available to them; what assessment he has made of the length of time it takes for financial aid to be given to organic farmers after application under the Organic Aid Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [96267]

Mr. Morley: Prior to the introduction of the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS), the Government considered carefully the question of whether those already farming organically should receive aid. We decided to target available resources on the conversion period when yields drop and premia for organic produce are not available. I have no plans to extend aid beyond the five year period provided by the OFS.

I expect the review of the OFS to consider the take-up of organic aid by farmers since April 1999 and to make recommendations for the future design of the conversion aid schemes.

Advice to prospective organic farmers on how to obtain free advisory visits is provided by a dedicated Helpline telephone number and advice on conversion aid payments is available from MAFF Regional Service Centres. The scheme literature sent to each prospective applicant points out that organic farmers can still benefit from a range of aid measures which are available to farmers generally.

The timing of payments to farmers under the Organic Aid Scheme formed part of the 1998 review of support for the organic sector. The review recommended moving from payments made in arrears to payments made annually in advance, at the end of the first quarter. We implemented the recommendation and have retained the same pattern of payments in the OFS.

We want to see organic farming succeed. We inherited a situation in which total payment for organic conversion averaged about £1 million annually. Over the last six months we have allocated about £16 million to more than 750 farmers. In the debate on agriculture on 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 1131, my right hon. Friend the Minister announced that further money would be made available. This will allow another 250 or so farmers to benefit from the OFS. And it will allow us to pay aid to all the farmers already in the OFS much sooner than would otherwise have been possible.

TREASURY

Offshore Betting

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the situation regarding offshore betting following the judgment of Mr. Justice Lightman in July; and if he will make a statement. [94812]

Mr. Timms: The Government are concerned about the potential growth of offshore betting and are currently considering how best to ensure that bookmakers in the United Kingdom pay their fair share of taxes and are protected from unfair competition. Customs and Excise have appealed Mr. Justice Lightman's decision and I have asked them whether early changes to the law are required to maintain its effectiveness.

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he *(a)* has established and *(b)* published a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment. [94858]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government are committed to ensuring their policies are fair and inclusive, and focus on public service users, not providers. This aim is contained in guidance (published in 1998) which helps Departments consider the impact of their policies on gender, ethnicity and disability. In addition to considering impact the guidance encourages consultation with women's groups and others where appropriate and action to deal with any differential impact if this appears appropriate. The Treasury applies the principles contained in the guidance when developing its policies. For example a full gender analysis of the Budget's impact was undertaken last year and will be again this year.

National Statistics

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the options paper on access to registration records which was submitted to him by the Director of the Office of National Statistics. [94914]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The essence of the Registrar General's advice was included in the consultation document "Registration: Modernising a Vital Service" published on 8 September, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the grades of posts which have been transferred from the Contributions Agency to the Treasury in the year prior to the passing of the Social Security Contributions (Transfer of Functions, etc) Act 1999; how many members of staff will be transferred in the coming year; and what is the nature of the posts of the staff who have been or are to be transferred. [95509]

Dawn Primarolo: All the staff of the Contributions Agency were transferred to the Inland Revenue on 1 April 1999, their grades being as follows:

CA grade	*IR grade*	*Civil service grade*
A1	E2	AA
A2	E1	AO
B1	E1	AO
B2	D	EO
B3	D	EO
B3	D	EO
C2	C2	HEO
C3	C1	HEO
D1	B	UG7
D2	B	UG7
D3	B	UG6
SCS	SCS	SCS

All posts concerned were related to the collection of NICs and the recording and supply of NICs information.

Civil Procurement

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the Review of Civil Procurement in Central Government; and if she will make a statement. [95452]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Work is progressing to ensure that the Office of Government Commerce will be operational by 1 April 2000. A Chief Executive will be appointed in November and I hope to be able to announce shortly the composition of the Supervisory Board and the transfer of its constituent agencies.

Trade Missions

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many trade missions he has led since taking office; and to which countries. [94973]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* None. Trade missions are usually carried out by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Resource Accounting

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to include (i) central Government grants paid to and (ii) the budgets of *(a)* local authorities in England, *(b)* the Scottish Parliament and Executive, *(c)* the National Assembly for Wales and *(d)* the Northern Ireland Assembly in resource accounting procedures for the 1999–2000 and subsequent financial years. [96459]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* Central government grants paid to local authorities will be recorded in the resource accounts of the relevant Government departments making these grants. Expenditure covered by the budgets of local authorities in England falls outside the resource accounting boundary, and therefore will not be included in resource accounts.

Grants to the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Executive, and, if devolution takes place, the Northern Ireland Assembly will represent the allocation of funds to those bodies, and will be shown in the resource accounts of respectively the Wales Office, Scotland Office, and Northern Ireland Office.

Expenditure by the National Assembly for Wales will appear in its resource accounts.

Accounting policies for expenditure by the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly are a matter for those bodies. I understand, however, that legislation currently before the Scottish Parliament envisages control by the Scottish Parliament of resources, and hence resource accounting.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amendments, additions and deletions will be made to the Resource Accounting Manual, as published in August 1999, that will apply to the 1999–2000 financial year. [96460]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The Resource Accounting Manual is updated as necessary to take into account the impact on resource accounting of new accounting standards issued by the Accounting Standards Board (ASB) and other accounting developments including, for example, refinements arising from the implementation of resource accounting by departments.

The amendments to the version of the Manual published in August 1999, to apply to the 1999–2000 resource accounts, will take into account the amendment to Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 5 "Reporting the Substance of Transactions—Private Finance Initiative and Similar Contracts", and FRS 15 "Tangible Fixed Assets"—both issued by the ASB.

These and future amendments, following consultation with the Financial Reporting Advisory Board, will be included in periodic updates to the Manual, which I understand the House of Commons Library has arranged to receive.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to exempt energy use for all types of industrial electrolysis from the Climate Change Levy. [96709]

Mr. Timms: As indicated in the consultation document published by Customs and Excise on Budget day, coal and gas used in chemical reactions will not be subject to the levy. In the light of the representations received on the treatment of electrolysis, my hon. Friend the then Economic Secretary announced on 27 July 1999, *Official Report,* column *390,* that we proposed to extend this exemption to electricity used in certain processes.

Following that announcement we have received further representations, all of which are receiving careful consideration.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if liabilities incurred by Departments of State as a result of *(a)* private finance initiatives and *(b)* public private partnerships will be accounted for under the principles outlined in Chapter 4 of the Resource Accounting Manual published in August. [96848]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Any liabilities incurred as a result of such transactions will be accounted for in line with the requirements of Chapter 9 of the Resource Accounting Manual. This states that for all complex transactions, the overriding principles of Financial Reporting Standards (FRS) 5 "Reporting the Substance of Transactions" should be followed.

In particular, an amendment to the version of the Manual published in August 1999, which has been agreed with the Financial Reporting Advisory Board, will make clear that Private Finance Initiative (PFI) transactions should be accounted for in accordance with the Treasury Taskforce's Technical Note No. 1 (revised) "How to account for PFI transactions".

The Technical Note sets out additional practical guidance on how the Accounting Standards Board's Application Note (AN) "Amendment to FRS 5—Private Finance Initiative and Similar Contracts" is to be followed in the public sector and should be read in conjunction with the AN.

In addition, Chapter 4 of the Manual sets out the disclosure requirements in respect of commitments under contracts for which departments have not made provision in their resource accounts.

HEALTH

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* his Department's and *(b)* the Royal College of Medicine's recommended minimum population which should be served by an accident and emergency unit in England. [92572]

Ms Stuart: The configuration of local accident and emergency services should be determined in accordance with local needs. Neither the Department of Health nor the Royal Colleges set minimum population requirements.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will give a substantive reply to the Question tabled by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden for answer on 26 July. [96851]

Ms Stuart: I replied to the right hon. Member today.

Correspondence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter sent by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East to him on 14 June about representations on the Health Bill [*Lords*] and Pro-Life legislation. [96484]

Yvette Cooper: I am sorry the hon. Member has not received a reply to his letter. The correspondence appears to have been misplaced. I have now received a copy of the original papers and will ensure that a reply is sent to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Continence Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he will publish the NHS guidance on continence services; [96073]

(2) what measures he intends to take to ensure that local health authorities and primary care groups implement the forthcoming guidance on continence services; [96075]

(3) what is the earliest practical date from which local health authorities and social services will have to incorporate the NHS guidance on continence services into their budgets; [96074]

(4) what meetings he and his officials have had with GP representatives to ensure that GPs are proactive in identifying patients who need continence care. [96076]

Mr. Hutton: We have recently received the report from the working group which was set up to advise the Department on guidance for continence services. We are now considering the report. The working group included a general practitioner representative. We hope to publish the guidance in the near future.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is provided by NHS Direct to callers who call with inquiries about continence; and what is the source of that information. [96077]

Ms Stuart: The way in which NHS Direct deals with calls about continence will depend very much on the nature of the caller's symptoms and needs. Calls from members of the public generally fall into two broad categories. If the continence problem is a new symptom for the caller, the nurse adviser would assess the call using the relevant protocol and would refer the caller to the most appropriate health professional, for example the general practitioner. Otherwise, if the call was a general inquiry about continence, the caller would be referred to the most relevant source for further information.

Acupuncture

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what courses exist for training in acupuncture; how these are funded; what financial support students can claim while studying; what plans he has to review the arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [96850]

Ms Stuart: The identification and accreditation of suitable training courses for any complementary therapy is primarily the responsibility of the professional body or bodies which regulate it. An increasing number of higher education courses in complementary and alternative medicine are being offered in publicly-funded institutions and are meeting the requirements set by the Education Student Support Regulations 1999 for automatic designation for student support. While the Department for Education and Employment does not routinely collect details of such courses, any which are either wholly run by a private institution or are jointly provided by a privately and publicly funded institution must apply to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for special designation.

Any student on a designated course receives the same package of financial student support as any student in higher education. Tuition fees are means-tested and, depending on individual circumstances, a student may pay all, part, or none of the cost himself. Student loans are available. And supplementary grants may be made in particular circumstances, for example to disabled students or those with dependants. Students on non-designated courses do not qualify for student support.

Optical Services

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the value of the vouchers given to pensioners for the purchase of spectacles; and if he will make a statement. [96600]

Mr. Hutton: Children and adults of all ages on low incomes are eligible for optical vouchers which vary in value depending upon the power of the prescription. From last April we increased the voucher values from between 2.5 per cent. and 18 per cent. to target help towards patients with the highest refractory errors. As a result the highest value voucher increased from £125 to £147.50. We will shortly be announcing the increase to take effect from April 2000.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Publications

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list her Department's spending on official publications since May 1997. [93689]

Marjorie Mowlam: The spending on official publications by the Cabinet Office and its Executive Agencies between 1 May 1997 and 31 July 1999, which includes identifiable costs incurred by the Department in publishing, production and purchase of copies for official use, is listed in a table, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. This excludes publications produced solely for internal purposes. Where the Department makes use of a private sector publisher, the publishing, printing and design costs are normally met by the publisher, as part of their acceptance of the risks of publication.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list all performance targets set for her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94989]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Cabinet Office has no performance targets other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2001 (Cm 4181).

The targets for each of my Department's agencies are shown in the table.

Details of performance targets for COI can be found in COI's annual reports. The last report was published in July 1999 by the Stationery Office (ISBN: 0–10–273199–3).

None of the non-departmental public bodies are executive and are therefore included within the rest of my Department's targets.

1997–98

Target	*Target date*
Security Facilities Executive—Targets announced 15 July 1997 (Official Report WA 100–101)	
To achieve 100% cost recovery in accruals terms excluding 0.5% restructuring costs	Year to 31 March 1998
To achieve a Vote surplus of £0.2 million, excluding restructuring costs	Year to 31 March 1998
To achieve sales of £20 million	Year to 31 March 1998
To achieve a reduction in the unit cost of outputs of no less than 4% in real terms	Year to 31 March 1998
To achieve a customer satisfaction rating of 92%	Year to 31 March 1998
To reassess the timetable and produce a revised action plan for attaining Investors in People accreditation in 1999	By 31 March 1998
To maintain accreditation to quality standard ISO 9000, and extend it to cover Common Services	By 31 March 1998
Property Advisers to the Civil Estate—Target announced 23 July 1997 (Official Report WA 582)	
To identify savings from proposals to be agreed with departments for the co-ordination of property activities on the Civil Estate which in net present terms should be at least 10 times the agency's related running costs	Year to 31 March 1998
To deliver on time at least 85% of the Central Advice Unit's annual work plan	Year to 31 March 1998
To recover 100% of the costs of providing intelligent client services and to increase the percentage of all the agency's running costs recovered	Year to 31 March 1998
To dispose of 110 freeholds and leaseholds within an annual net provision of £95 million	Year to 31 March 1998
To achieve 75% overall customer satisfaction for the agency's services.	Year to 31 March 1998
The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency—Targets announced 30 July 1997 (Official Report WA 315)	
To break even on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 1998
To deliver CCTA services within voted provision	Year to 31 March 1998
To establish a baseline for operation within the CCTA customer charter	31 March 1998
To secure savings which will result in a 5% reduction in the cost of supporting services in 1998–98	31 March 1998
To achieve 85% of customers assessing satisfaction with CCTA's services at levels 1 and 2 of a 5 point scale	Year to 31 March 1998
Civil Service College—Targets announced 30 July 1997 (Official Report WA 315)	
To break even on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 1998
To earn £1.5 million from consultancy	Year to 31 March 1998
To attract 900 students from the private sector	Year to 31 March 1998
To attract 1,515 students from the Senior Civil Service	Year to 31 March 1998
To earn 88% of students' course evaluations in the highest 2 of 6 categories	Year to 31 March 1998

1997–98

Target	Target date
Central Office of Information—Targets announced 30 July 1997 (Official Report WA 315)	
To achieve a surplus of £1 million in modified historical cost terms after recovering all costs including interest on borrowings	Year to 31 March 1998
To achieve a 2% increase in efficiency as measured by unit cost reduction	Year to 31 March 1998
To achieve an average score of 8.25 out of 10 for COI customer satisfaction index	Year to 31 March 1998

1998–99

Target	Target date
The Buying Agency—Targets announced 28 April 1998 (Official Report WA 109–100)	
To generate a return on capital employed of 8%	Year to 31 December 1998
To increase total sales by 2% on an accruals basis	Year to 31 December 1998
To reduce the cost per pound of total savings by 2.5% on 1997 outturn	Year to 31 December 1998
To maintain the cost per pound of total sales at 1997 outturn	Year to 31 December 1998
To resolve 95% of customers' complaints received in the year within one month, except where explicitly agreed otherwise by the customer	Year to 31 December 1998
To deliver 95% of direct orders by the due date	Year to 31 December 1998
To secure re-accreditation under ISO 9001	31 December 1998
To reduce the Agency's electricity consumption per member of staff at its headquarters by 3%	Year to 31 December 1998
Property Advisers to the Civil Estate—Targets announced 7 May 1998 (Official Report WA 445)	
To identify savings from proposals to be agreed with departments for the co-ordination of property activities on the Civil Estate which in net present terms should be at least 11 times the agency's related running costs	Year to 31 March 1999
To deliver on time at least 90% of the Central Advice Unit's annual work plan	Year to 31 March 1999
To recover 100% of the costs of providing intelligent client services and to increase the percentage of all the agency's running costs recovered to 10%	Year to 31 March 1999
To dispose of 75 freeholds and leaseholds and to maintain expenditure within voted provision	Year to 31 March 1999
To achieve 2.5% improvement in overall customer satisfaction for the agency's services	Year to 31 March 1999
The Government Car and Despatch Agency—16 June 1998 (Official Report WA 152)	
To break even on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 1999
To maintain sales turnover at 1997–98 outturn	Year to 31 March 1999
To maintain expenditure and receipts within voted provision	Year to 31 March 1999
To improve the gross contribution as a percentage of sales revenue by 2%	Year to 31 March 1999
To increase income per point of labour cost to £2.00	Year to 31 March 1999
To review the existing customer satisfaction survey and establish a benchmark for future performance	31 March 1999
To achieve an annual average of 26 miles per gallon for the GCS and IDS fleets	Year to 31 March 1999
The Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency—Targets announced 21 July 1998 (Official Report WA 444)	
To break even on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 1999
To deliver CCTA services within voted provision	Year to 31 March 1999
To achieve 75% of customers surveyed confirming that CCTA has operated within the terms of its Charter	Year to 31 March 1999
To secure a 5% reduction in the cost of support services	Year to 31 March 1999
To secure customer satisfaction at levels 1 and 2 (out of 5) on 85% of assignments and services delivered	Year to 31 March 1999
Civil Service College—21 July 1998 (Official Report WA 444)	
To break even on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 1999
To achieve £900,000 of consultancy income	Year to 31 March 1999
To attract 1,500 students from the Senior Civil Service	Year to 31 March 1999
To attract 900 students from the private sector	Year to 31 March 1999
To earn 88% of student course evaluations in the highest 2 categories (on a 6 point scale)	Year to 31 March 1999
Central Office of Administration—Targets announced 21 July 1998 (Official Report WA 444)	
To achieve a financial surplus of £1 million on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 1999
To achieve efficiency improvements of a unit cost reduction of 2%	Year to 31 March 1999
To achieve a customer satisfaction index of 8.25 (out of 10)	Year to 31 March 1999

1999–2000 Targets set for the Cabinet Office Agencies for 1999–2000 are covered by (but not listed in) the Department's PSA targets

Target	Target date
The Buying Agency—Targets announced 28 July 1999 (Official Report WA 322)	
To generate a return on capital employed of 8% (excluding the costs of restructuring)	Year to 31 December 1999
To reduce the cost per pound of savings by 2.5% on 19998 outturn	Year to 31 December 1999
To raise customer satisfaction by 5% over the year	Year to 31 December 1999
The Government Car and Despatch Agency—Targets announced 12 May 1999 (Official Report WA 174)	
To break even on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 2000
To achieve sales turnover of £11 million	Year to 31 March 2000
To maintain expenditure and receipts within voted provision	Year to 31 March 2000
To maintain gross contribution as a percentage of sales at 1998–99 outturn	Year to 31 March 2000
To increase income per point of labour cost to £2.04	Year to 31 March 2000
To improve customer satisfaction by 2%	Year to 31 March 2000
To convert to alternative environmentally friendly fuels 50% of the cars purchased and capable of conversion	Year to 31 March 2000
Property Advisers to the Civil Estate—Targets announced 15 July 1999 (Official Report WA 285)	
To identify savings from proposals to be agreed with departments for the co-ordination of property activities on the Civil Estate which in net present value terms should be at least 12 times the agency's related running costs	Year to 31 March 2000
To deliver on time at least 93% of the Central Advice Unit's annual work plan	Year to 31 March 2000
To recover 100% of the costs of providing intelligent client services and to increase the percentage of all the agency's running costs recovered to 12%	Year to 31 March 2000
To achieve an improvement in overall customer satisfaction for the agency's services	Year to 31 March 2000
Civil Service College—Targets announced 15 July 1999 (Official Report WA 286)	
To break even on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 2000
To generate an income on consultancy of £1.1 million	Year to 31 March 2000
To attract 1,900 students from the Senior Civil Service	Year to 31 March 2000
To attract 900 students from the private sector	Year to 31 March 2000
To achieve 89% of course evaluations by students in the highest two categories (on a 6 point scale)	Year to 31 March 2000

1999–2000 Targets set for the Cabinet Office Agencies for 1999–2000 are covered by (but not listed in) the Department's PSA targets

Target	Target date
Central Office of Information—Targets announced 15 July 1999 (Official Report WA 286)	
To achieve a financial surplus of £0.1 million on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 2000
To achieve efficiency improvements of a unit cost reduction of 2%	Year to 31 March 2000
To achieve a customer satisfaction index of 8.25 (out of 10)	Year to 31 March 2000
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency—Target announced 20–7-99 (Official Report WA 490)	
To break even on an accruals basis	Year to 31 March 2000
To deliver CCTA services within voted provision	Year to 31 March 2000
To achieve 75% of customers surveyed confirming that CCTA has operated within the terms of its Charter	Year to 31 March 2000
To secure savings that will reduce the cost of support services by 5%	Year to 31 March 2000
To achieve 93% of customer satisfaction evaluations in the top 2 boxes of a 5 box scale	Year to 31 March 2000

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Efficiency

16. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent measures he has taken to improve efficiency in police forces. [95005]

Mr. Straw: Studies by both Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Audit Commission have shown that there is considerable scope for improving the efficiency of police forces thus releasing more officers for key operational duties.

The Comprehensive Spending Review set the police an annual target of two per cent. efficiency gains which must be reinvested in frontline policing. The new duty of Best Value will be placed upon Police Authorities from 1 April 2000, and will require them to deliver efficient and high quality services and demonstrate year on year improvements.

Police Establishment

17. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to increase the total number of police officers in England and Wales. [95006]

19. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement regarding plans to increase police numbers. [95008]

Mr. Straw: I made a full statement of the position on police numbers to the Home Affairs Committee and to this House on 26 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns 821–34.

Under legislation passed by the previous government, the powers of the Home Secretary to set overall police numbers were removed. The Government have allocated money for a Crime Fighting Fund which among other things will provide the funding for 5,000 more recruits over and above the number forces would otherwise have recruited over the next three years, commencing in April 2000. £35 million of new money will be available to support this next year, and there will be further funding in the two following years. All of this is additional to the Comprehensive Spending Review settlement for policing.

29. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Police Federation to discuss police numbers. [95018]

Mr. Straw: I have regular formal and informal meetings with all three Police Staff Associations to discuss a range of issues, including police numbers.

30. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers retired from forces in England and Wales in the three years to 31 March; and if he will make a statement. [95019]

Mr. Straw: The numbers of police officers who have retired over the last three years are as follows:

Year	Number
1996–97	4,478
1997–98	4,807
1998–99	4,204

These figures show the total of ordinary and medical retirements in each year and have been obtained from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. They do not include losses to the service through death nor do they include the figures for those officers who resigned or were dismissed in each of the above years. For these latter details I would refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 21 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *625*.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were recruited to police forces in England and Wales in the last three years. [95009]

Mr. Straw: Including transfers between forces, 18,384 police officers were recruited by forces in England and Wales between 1996–97 and 1998–99.

Licensing Hours

18. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to make changes to the pub licensing regime. [95007]

34. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to make changes to the pub licensing regime. [95023]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We hope to publish a White Paper early in the New Year setting out our proposals for modernising the liquor and public entertainment licensing laws, and to bring forward a Bill when Parliamentary time permits.

Confiscation of Criminals' Assets

21. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to re-examine the rules under which the assets of convicted criminals are confiscated; and what steps he is planning to take to ensure that full disclosure of assets takes place. [95010]

Mr. Charles Clarke: While the courts already have extensive powers to require disclosure of assets following a conviction, and to order confiscation, the Government are preparing a package of measures to strengthen further the investigation, tracing and confiscation of criminal proceeds. The proposals will take account of the Home Office Working Group on Confiscation, whose report was published in November and is available in the Library, and of a recently initiated study by the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit, which will be completed early next year.

Neighbourhood Watch

22. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support his Department gives to neighbourhood watch schemes. [95011]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Home Office officials work closely with the Neighbourhood Watch movement, which we support enthusiastically. We have funded national initiatives such as publicity campaigns and training packs which have played a considerable part in the continued growth of the movement over the years.

Drug Misuse

23. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the education and youth services about combating drug abuse. [95012]

Mr. Boateng: I take the opportunity in local visits to speak with teachers, youth workers and others engaged in delivering the Government's anti drugs strategy. My Department is fully engaged with the Department for Education and Employment about the role of education and youth services in combating drug abuse.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

24. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to encourage greater use of anti-social behaviour orders. [95013]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I wrote to all Chief Executives of local authorities and Chief Officers of police on 13 October to remind them of the uses to which anti-social behaviour orders might be put. My officials are also working closely with the Local Government Association to develop good practice on the use of these orders which we will circulate widely.

I am encouraged that more authorities are considering the use of anti-social behaviour orders—anecdotal evidence suggests that the simple threat of an order can lead to significant improvements in behaviour.

Cremation

25. **Mr. Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the regulations governing the cremation of body parts. [95014]

Mr. Boateng: Provided the body itself has been cremated and the necessary documentation is available, there appears to be no reason why the cremation of body parts removed in the course of a post mortem should not take place. Where the body was buried, separate cremation of the organs is not possible, but I am prepared to propose an amendment to the Cremation Regulations to facilitate their disposal in accordance with the family's wishes.

Police (Staffordshire)

26. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chief constable of Staffordshire to discuss police numbers. [95015]

Mr. Straw: The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), met the Chief Constable of Staffordshire in September to discuss a range of policing issues, including resources.

Under legislation passed by the previous government, the number of police officers in each force is determined by chief constables on the basis of the resources made available to them.

Asylum Applications

27. **Mr. Malins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the backlog of asylum applications. [95016]

Mrs. Roche: We are developing new procedures to speed up the consideration of cases in the current backlog. In addition we are recruiting around 250 new staff to deal purely with asylum applications, and training more of our existing staff in asylum skills. The Immigration and Asylum Bill sets out our proposals to deliver a more effective asylum system. This will protect those in genuine need of protection while dealing swiftly and firmly with unfounded applications. The Bill will deliver key elements of our strategy to reform the asylum system, including new support arrangements for asylum seekers.

Young Offenders

28. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to speed up the process for bringing young offenders to trial. [95017]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Measures in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to reduce criminal justice delays have now been successfully piloted and start operating across England and Wales today. We are also starting pilots for statutory time limits in selected youth courts.

36. **Ms Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent measures he has taken to deal with persistent young offenders. [95025]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We are working with the youth justice services to halve the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders. This should cut offending on bail and enable quicker action to tackle offending behaviour. The Youth Justice Board has recently issued new practical guidance, and is helping local areas to produce joint improvement plans to ensure that the target will be achieved.

Scottish Legislation

31. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has held with the First Secretary, Scottish Parliament, and the Secretary of State for Scotland concerning the proposed

amendments to the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 as contained in the Immigration and Asylum Bill. [95020]

Mr. Straw: My officials and those of the Scottish Executive have been in regular contact over this and other matters throughout the passage of the Bill. The amendment brings Scottish social services legislation in line with provisions applying elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

HM Prison Preston

32. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what actions he proposes to take on the recently published report on HM Prison Preston. [95021]

Mr. Boateng: In accordance with the protocol for handling inspection reports, the Prison Service will produce an action plan within 30 working days of publication of the report, addressing all the recommendations made by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Telephone Harassment

33. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from chief constables on the working of the law in relation to telephone harassment in the light of information which has been supplied to him. [95022]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have no plans to do so at present.

Wormwood Scrubs

35. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Prison Officers Association about morale at Wormwood Scrubs prison. [95024]

Mr. Boateng: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary visited Wormwood Scrubs on 6 September and met representatives of staff associations, including the Prison Officers Association. This meeting covered a range of issues including concerns about the effect of the current investigations on their members. I visited Wormwood Scrubs on 13 October and met members of staff associations including the Prison Officers Association in private, when they were given the opportunity to raise any matters which affected their members.

Closed Circuit Television

37. **Mr. Rapson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money the Government are investing in CCTV systems in the current financial year. [95026]

Mr. Straw: Under the first round of the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV initiative, crime reduction partnerships in England and Wales have been invited to prepare final proposals on 376 bids for new and extended CCTV schemes mainly directed at tackling vehicle crime and crime problems in housing areas at a potential capital cost of £68 million, a proportion of which will be expended in the current financial year. Final decisions will be announced later in the year.

Mandatory Drug Testing

38. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on relations between the police and ethnic minorities of his proposals for mandatory drug testing. [95027]

Mr. Boateng: The police service needs to secure the trust and confidence of all sections of the community and to ensure that there is no unfair discrimination against any racial group. The police service is committed to a programme of action in response to the recommendations of the report of the Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence published in February, to ensure that this aim is achieved.

We would expect these principles to be reflected in any arrangements to be introduced for drug testing of arrestees.

Electoral Reform

39. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is considering to reform election procedure. [95028]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published the final report of the Working Party on Electoral Procedures on 19 October. He has welcomed the report and will be seeking the earliest practical opportunity for a Bill to carry forward the body of its recommendations.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions took place on the issue of commercial use of the electoral register between the Home Office Working Party on Electoral Procedures and *(a)* direct marketing organisations, *(b)* credit agency organisations, *(c)* other business organisations, *(d)* consumer organisations and *(e)* the Data Protection Registrar; if any of those organisations or individuals were invited to present their views in person to the Home Office Working Party on Electoral Procedures; and if he will consult further with these organisations before final decisions are taken on those aspects of the proposed Bill on reforming electoral procedures which would affect the use of the electoral register for commercial purposes. [96846]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: During the lifetime of the Working Party, members of its Secretariat held meetings as follows: with representatives of direct marketing organisations on two occasions; representatives of credit agency organisations on four occasions; and representatives of other business associations on three occasions. The Data Protection Registrar, by virtue of her statutory advisory role, was invited to make a personal presentation at one meeting of the Working Party. Further consultation is taking place on the Working Party's recommendations for restrictions on the sale of the electoral register for non-electoral purposes.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his Department's intention to publish the submissions made by businesses and individuals in response to the consultation document on

electoral procedures, with the exception of those who have asked for their submissions to remain private. [96847]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No. But any businesses or individuals can, of course, publish their own submissions if they wish to do so.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce trials of early voting at elections other than the Greater London Authority elections. [96685]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Working Party on Electoral Procedures, which published its final report on 19 October, recommended that early voting should be among the electoral innovations included in pilot schemes.

The Government have welcomed the Working Party's recommendations. We intend to legislate to give effect to them as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

Criminal Records Bureau

40. **Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the Criminal Records Bureau; and if he will make a statement. [95029]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There has been widespread support for the establishment of the Criminal Records Bureau. The Government have considered very carefully the many representations that we have received arguing for charges to be waived for checks carried out by the Bureau in the case of volunteers who work with children. The concerns which have been expressed have increased our determination that the cost of certificates from the Bureau should be kept as low as possible. The cost of certificates has been previously estimated at between £5 and £10 depending on type of certificate .

Freedom of Information

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress with freedom of information legislation. [95001]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Consultation document on Freedom of Information, published on 24 May 1999, invited comments on the draft legislation. We received a total of 2,248 submissions, all but 400 of which were part of an organised petition about scientific experimentation on animals. Copies of the submission have been placed in the Library.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 22 October the changes we propose to make to the draft Bill following the consultation period. We will now seek to introduce a Freedom of Information Bill as soon as the legislative timetable allows.

Crime Reduction Partnerships

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress with the formation of crime reduction partnerships. [95004]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The crime and disorder reduction partnerships brought into being by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 have published their strategies. They are currently implementing them. This is a vital part of the attack upon crime, based on local priorities and needs.

Suspended Sentences

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he has made of the consequent reduction in prison numbers if suspended sentences of imprisonment were more widely available to the judiciary. [95475]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Estimates of the likely effect on the prison population vary between a few hundred and a few thousand depending upon the exact nature of the new arrangements introduced, whether the sentences they replaced were custodial or non-custodial, the length of any such custodial sentences and the rate of activation of the new suspended sentences. The current restriction, which limits suspension of a custodial sentence to cases where exceptional circumstances exist, was introduced by the Criminal Justice Act 1991. Criminal Statistics for England and Wales 1997 show that the number of offenders sentenced for indictable offences to a fully suspended sentence fell from 25,800 in 1987 to 2,700 in 1993.

Remembrance Sunday

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to invite German, Italian and Japanese veterans to join the Remembrance Sunday parade in Whitehall. [96029]

Mr. Straw: There are no plans to widen the attendance at the Cenotaph ceremony on Remembrance Sunday to include German, Japanese and Italian veterans.

The Royal British Legion, which organises the march past the Cenotaph which follows the official ceremony on Remembrance Sunday, has however made proposals which will allow greater participation in future years by non-ex-Service groups and individuals. I have welcomed the proposals for expansion of the march past put forward by the Royal British Legion, and my officials are discussing the details with them.

National Attack Warning System

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* civil protection organisations and *(c)* others about the content of messages to be delivered by the National Attack Warning System. [96538]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The National Attack Warning System is designed to be used in war. It is inappropriate at this stage to discuss with local authorities or other civil protection organisations the precise content of the messages to be carried.

Discussions about the system are continuing with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Paddington Train Crash

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if interim recommendations relevant to civil

protection matters will be published about the Paddington crash in advance of the full report being published. [96541]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has commissioned inquiries into the crash. I shall be looking very carefully at any lessons for the wider civil protection response which may be identified in those inquiries.

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in the investigation by the Metropolitan Police into the case of WPC Yvonne Fletcher. [95457]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The continuing investigation into WPC Fletcher's murder is an operational matter for the Metropolitan Police. They have made clear, however, that they intend to pursue this investigation vigorously and expect full co-operation from the Libyan authorities.

Cyber Crime

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the letter of 1 July from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Firms, what action he has taken to promote international co-operation in the field of cyber crime detection and pursuit. [94975]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government have been playing an active role in promoting international co-operation in this new and important area of criminality. The conference of G8 Justice and Interior Ministers held in Washington in December 1997, in which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary participated, agreed a set of principles and an action plan to combat high-tech crime. The principles in the Washington communiqué, a copy of which is in the Library, were subsequently endorsed by the European Union's Justice and Home Affairs Council under my right hon. Friend's chairmanship during the United Kingdom's European Union Presidency.

G8 experts, including a Home Office led delegation from the United Kingdom, have since established a network of law enforcement contacts available around the clock to provide urgent assistance to authorities in partner countries investigating computer and internet crimes. The network is now expanding with United Kingdom encouragement, and a number of non-G8 countries including additional European Union Member States have joined.

Further progress was made at the meeting of G8 Justice and Interior Ministers in Moscow on 18–20 October. I was present on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. The Moscow communiqué, of which I am placing a copy in the Library, includes agreement on new principles for providing law enforcement authorities with transborder access to stored data needed for criminal investigations. The Ministerial conference has instructed G8 experts to develop options within one year for co-operation in tracing computer communications taking place for illegal purposes, both while they occur and afterwards, as part of a continuing wide-ranging programme of work.

The United Kingdom is also participating in work in the Council of Europe to draft a Cybercrime Convention. Information about this was given by the Minister of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), on 21 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *621*.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94983]

Mr. Straw: A large number of performance targets are set within the Home Office and its executive agencies and associated non-departmental public bodies, and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, a wide range of information on performance targets is contained in the various Home Office and agencies' business plans. Copies of available publications have been placed in the Library and, in some instances, on the internet at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/index.htm.

Official Secrets Act

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to allow someone charged under the provisions of the Official Secrets Acts to advance a defence based upon overriding public interest; and if he will make a statement. [96071]

Mr. Straw: The Government believe that the Official Secrets Act 1989 provides a sound basis for protecting sensitive official information. We have no current plans to replace or amend it.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many charges of racial discrimination have been made by staff of the Commission for Racial Equality against the Commission itself in each of the last five years. [96701]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The number of complaints made by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) staff to the Employment Tribunal alleging racial discrimination for each of the last five years is as follows:

1995—0
1996—5
1997—4
1998—8
1999—3

Of these 20 cases, three are ongoing, five were settled and the Tribunal dismissed 12. No finding of racial discrimination has ever been made against the CRE by the Tribunal.

Chinese State Visit

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis following

the visit of the President of China to London; what further discussions he plans; and if he will make a statement. [96697]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary meets regularly with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to discuss policing issues in London, and there are regular contacts with the Metropolitan Police at both Ministerial and official level. There were no specific discussions of the issues specified at my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's meetings prior to the Chinese State Visit nor at other meetings between Ministers and officials and the Metropolitan Police. At a regular meeting between my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Commissioner on 27 October 1999, the Commissioner told my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that the Metropolitan Police were conducting an internal review into the policing of the visit of the President of China.

Channel Islands

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what legislative powers he has advised the authorities in Guernsey that they cannot alter Section 201 of their income tax law; and if he will make a statement on the powers of HM Government in relation to taxes levied in the Channel Islands. [96849]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are regular discussions between United Kingdom officials and the authorities in the Crown Dependencies on matters of mutual interest. I understand that the Guernsey authorities do not now propose to amend Section 201 of the Income Tax (Guernsey) Law 1975. All primary legislation passed by the Channel Island legislatures requires the Assent of the Queen in Council.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Class Sizes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many of the 4,500 extra teachers provided for under the Class Size Initiative had been recruited as at 30 September; of those recruited, how many came from existing jobs in *(a)* infant classes and *(b)* junior classes; and how many were newly-qualified teachers; [96833]

(2) how many teachers were in post in infant classes as at 30 September 1998 and 30 September 1999. [96832]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have provided funding for 4,500 extra teachers from September 1999 to implement our infant class size pledge. Of this number, 3,000 are additional to the 1,500 we funded from September 1998. LEAs have informed us that they have employed the extra teachers for which they received funding. Full statistical returns of the number of teachers in post are collected each January. We do not hold information on where individual teachers are recruited from, but we are providing Local Education Authorities with the resources to take on additional teachers to enable them to reduce infant classes to 30 or below.

Parental Leave

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice he has circulated to schools about compliance with the Parental Leave Regulations. [96410]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend has not circulated any advice to schools. The regulations have not yet been laid before Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will issue guidance on parental leave.

Mental Health (Children)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the evidence published by the Mental Health Foundation about the emotional development of the nation's children. [95217]

Jacqui Smith: We welcome the Mental Health Foundation's Report "Bright Futures". An official from my Department had observer status on the steering group which guided Bright Future's preparation and will tomorrow attend a seminar the Mental Health Foundation is holding to review its impact.

My officials are working with their Department of Health counterparts to ensure that policy on child and adolescent mental health services takes account of educational considerations. We shall further consider Bright Futures in the context of the forthcoming review of the guidance we issue to schools and local education authorities on the education of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children of asylum seekers are currently not receiving an education because local education authorities have not offered them a school place. [96195]

Jacqui Smith: Children of asylum seekers are entitled to education in the same way as other children, irrespective of their immigration status or right to residence in a particular location. It is the legal duty of the Local Education Authorities to ensure that education is available for all children of compulsory school age in their area appropriate to age, abilities and aptitudes and any special educational needs they may have. Local Education Authorities receive funding from this Department for the education of children of asylum seekers in the same way as they do for other children.

Teacher Retirements

Mr. Cranusby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers have retired as a result of ill-health in the three years to 31 March. [96430]

Ms Estelle Morris: The number of teachers who have retired as a result of ill health from the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sector, England, in financial years 1996–97 to 1998–99 are as follows:

	Number
1996–97	4,980
1997–98	3,290
1998–99[1]	2,220

[1] 1998–99 data are provisional

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what his policy is on the inclusion in mainstream schools of children with special educational needs; and if he will make a statement. [96463]

Jacqui Smith: Promoting inclusion within mainstream schools, where parents want it and appropriate support can be provided, is a cornerstone of the Government's special educational needs strategy. The education of children with special needs is a key challenge for the nation, and critical to the creation of a fully inclusive society. There are strong educational, as well as social and moral, grounds for educating pupils with special needs or disabilities with their peers.

Where parents want a mainstream setting for their child our policy is to try to provide it. We are providing, this year, £8 million through the Standards Fund and £20 million through the Schools Access Initiative to promote inclusion. Equally, when parents want a specialist setting for their child it is important that their wishes are respected. Our approach has been practical, not dogmatic. We are advocating inclusion by choice and have underlined that there remains a continuing and vital role for special schools. The key objective must be to safeguard the interests of all children and to ensure that they achieve to their full potential.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each local education authority *(a)* the number of pupils with moderate learning difficulties and *(b)* the proportion who were taught in special schools in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [96498]

Jacqui Smith: Central statistics giving details of the number of pupils by type of special educational need are not collected.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the research by Professor Alan Dyson of Newcastle-upon-Tyne University on the benefits to children with moderate learning difficulties of attending mainstream schools. [96507]

Jacqui Smith: The report highlighted the wide variations which exist in the access to, and the quality of, provision for pupils with special educational needs. Working together to better meet special educational needs is a key message within the SEN programme of action. Spearheading action under this theme is the expansion of the SEN regional co-ordination projects to cover the whole of England by April 2000. The projects are encouraging local authorities to work with each other, the voluntary and private sectors and other partners to better plan and meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and to standardise provision.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional support he plans to give to *(a)* mainstream schools and *(b)* special schools for children with special educational needs. [96478]

Jacqui Smith: Our Programme of Action on Special Educational Needs, published in November 1998, is an integral part of our strategy for improving all schools. Measures in it will develop the existing statutory framework and procedures, building on experience and best practice. They aim to shift the emphasis from procedures to practical support. It is a measure of the priority we are giving to children with SEN that we have virtually doubled—to £35 million—the targeted support for SEN under the Standards Fund in 1999–2000. We have also increased five-fold the capital support under the Schools Access Initiative, from the £4 million we inherited in 1997–98, to £20 million in 1999–2000. We are planning further big increases to the SEN Standards Fund and the Schools Access Initiative for the following two years. This specific funding for SEN is in addition to the very substantial increases in the overall resources available to schools.

School Funding (Leeds)

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average funding allocation per child attending *(a)* junior and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the last 20 years, in real terms, in Leeds Local Education Authority. [96189]

Ms Estelle Morris: The table shows the primary and secondary education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per pupil in real terms, for Leeds Education Authority, for each of the last ten years, at 1990–2000 prices. The information is not available for the years prior to the introduction of SSAs, which occurred in 1990–91.

	Unit SSA allocations in real terms (£'s per pupil)		*Change on previous year (Percentage)*	
Year	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1990–91	1,916	2,793	–	–
1991–92	2,069	3,078	8.0	10.2
1992–93	2,113	3,168	2.1	2.9
1993–94	2,095	3,118	–0.9	–1.6
1994–95	2,091	2,998	–0.2	–3.8
1995–96	2,027	2,765	–3.0	–7.8
1996–97	2,052	2,805	1.2	1.5
1997–98	2,093	2,817	2.0	0.4
1998–99	2,156	2,876	3.0	2.1
1999–2000	2,227	2,922	3.3	1.6

Dyslexia

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress his Department is making in ensuring that schools recognise dyslexia and respond with appropriate teaching methods. [95311]

Jacqui Smith: Under the Education Act'1966, schools and local education authorities (LEAs) have a duty to identify and make suitable provision for all children with

special educational needs, including children with dyslexia. The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs gives guidance to schools and LEAs on how to meet this duty. Paragraphs 3.60 to 3.63 provide guidance on specific learning difficulties and have particular reference to dyslexia.

To assist schools in recognising dyslexia we have produced simple guidance which provides hints to primary school teachers to help them identify children who may be dyslexic. In addition the Department has recently provided a grant to help the British Dyslexia Association produce a schools resource pack entitled "Achieving dyslexia friendly schools".

A recent seminar bringing together the main government departments and agencies, and external partners for an exchange of views on the key educational issues in the areas of dyslexia, was well received. Ways in which individual expertise and resources can be pooled were identified, and a consensus reached over a shared agenda for tackling issues in the areas of early identification, teacher training, and the use of ICT. An informal working group has been set up to take matters forward.

Changes to Initial Teacher Training introduced in September 1998 require all trainees to demonstrate that they are able to identify pupils who have special educational needs including specific learning difficulties and know where to get help in order to give positive and targeted support.

Anaphylaxis

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what action his Department has taken and what plans he has to ensure children from atopic families avoid early sensitisation to nut products and that parents and carers are aware of the risk of sensitisation; [96530]

(2) what information his Department issues concerning anaphylaxis and contact between young children and nut products; [96440]

(3) what recent representations he has received from groups concerned about anaphylaxis and the difficulties faced by sufferers in everyday life; [96438]

(4) what representations he has received from leisure providers concerning the use of their facilities, and participation in activities, by sufferers from anaphylaxis. [96654]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not received any recent representations from anaphylaxis groups or from leisure providers. We have issued guidance for schools on "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs" which contains advice on anaphylaxis. Advice is also available on the joint DfEE and Department of Health Wired for Health website. We will be consulting shortly on draft regulations on new nutritional standards for school lunches. The new standards will allow caterers flexibility to respond to the requirements of children who have allergies to particular foods. I will send a copy of the draft regulations to the hon. Member when they are published. The question about early sensitisation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94987]

Mr. Blunkett: My Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its PSA, and the measures of success it will use in the Output and Performance Analysis (OPA) published in March this year. A full list of the targets and target dates for Agencies and Executive NDPBs can be found annually in the Next Steps Report and Executive and Non-Departmental Public Bodies Report on the Stationery Office website. In addition, my Department has published a Strategic Framework to 2002: Learning and Working Together for the Future, setting out our aim, objectives, targets and supporting policies for that period; and has published the Government's National Learning Targets to 2002 in the leaflet "National Learning Targets for England for 2002—now including the new Learning Participation Target" and in its publication "National Learning Targets—action plan".

These high-level targets are supported at operational level by numerous targets to ensure delivery by individual units. Listing these operational targets would be inappropriate and disproportionate in terms of resources. However, the DfEE annual Departmental Report and Annual Report of the Employment Service also include performance related information.

Student Complaints

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education to publish its draft proposals for student complaints systems in higher education. [96590]

Mr. Wicks: I understand that the Quality Assurance Agency intends to issue its draft Code of Practice on Student Complaints and Appeals to higher education institutions and other interested parties for consultation during the week commencing 1 November.

Adult Education

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in the development of national programmes to deliver information and advice on education and training for adults. [96409]

Mr. Wicks: As set out in the White Paper, "Learning to Succeed" (Cm 4392), we want adults to have the help they need to make informed choices about learning and work. That help will be available through Learning Direct, the national learning helpline; through Lifelong Learning Partnerships, who are developing a free information and advice service for adults at local level; and, for unemployed people, through the comprehensive advice and support service associated with the Employment Service's New Deal programmes for young people, the unemployed and people with disabilities.

Since it was launched last year, Learning Direct has helped more than 860,000 callers. Following consultation earlier in the year, my Department is now agreeing plans with Lifelong Learning Partnerships for the development of information and advice services that are tailored to local needs. To date, more than 348,000 young people aged 18–24 and 144,000 adults aged 25 and over have received specialised advice and support through the New Deal.

AS Levels

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of *(a)* the policy of university admission authorities towards AS levels and *(b)* if they will make offers based on AS levels. [95867]

Mr. Wicks: It is for universities to decide on their admissions policies. Early indications are that they are considering using AS qualifications rather than GCSEs as predictors of likely A level performance. Universities such as Cambridge have also indicated that they are considering using the new Advanced Extension Award as an alternative to its STEP exam. Universities will normally make final offers on the basis of final A level and GNVQ scores, but may also include AS qualification and AE achievement as evidence of breadth and depth.

Access Funds

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students attending higher education institutions have received financial help from access funds in each of the last 10 academic years. [96186]

Mr. Wicks: The following table shows the number of successful applications in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98. Comparable figures for 1998–99 will not be available until the New Year. The figures for earlier years are not immediately available, but I shall write to my hon. Friend with them shortly.

These figures are based on returns from higher education institutions to the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Some institutions have not returned information for the relevant years. The returns show only approved applications, and some students have applied successfully more than once.

Year	*Number of successful applications*
1997–98	49,236
1996–97	52,256
1995–96	55,453

The Government have more than tripled spending on HE Access Funds, to £75 million, since 1997.

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the funding available for access funds for each further education college in England in the *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000 academic years. [96188]

Mr. Wicks: Total access funds provision for further education colleges has been £6.0 million in 1996–97. £6.0 million in 1997–98, £10.3 million in 1998–99 and £37.4 million in 1999–2000. Grants to individual colleges are published in an annual Further Education Council Circular. The references for the Circulars for the years in question are:

96/22 for 1996–97
97/32 for 1997–98
98/29 for 1998–99
99/27 for 1999–2000

Copies of the circulars have been placed in the Library.

Play Schemes (Exclusions)

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children were excluded from *(a)* local council and *(b)* other leisure and play schemes on the grounds of medical conditions which are not classed as disabilities. [96528]

Ms Hodge: The information required is not collected centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 2 November 1999

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

In-vehicle Technology

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research and developments have been made on in-vehicle technology to prevent law breaking. [94508]

Mr. Hill: There is a considerable quantity of research being undertaken both in Industry and Government to investigate the benefits that can be obtained from developments in in-vehicle technology to prevent law breaking. Advances in electronics and telematics promise to make measures for vehicle control (e.g. separation distance), identification and location both feasible and cost effective. One particular project sponsored by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is looking into a system of Intelligent Speed Adaptation which would be able to control the speed of vehicles automatically to prevent them exceeding speed limits.

Sellafield MOX Plant

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he will be in a position to decide on the future of the Sellafield MOX plant; [95918]

(2) if he will publish the outcome of the latest consultation on the Sellafield MOX plant. [95919]

Mr. Mullin: The consultation on the economic case for the Sellafield MOX plant ended on 23 July 1999. An announcement of the Ministers' decisions will be made following careful consideration of all the responses.

Rail Safety

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports he has received on signals passed at danger since taking office; when they were received; and what action followed from them. [95935]

Mr. Prescott *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* Since taking office I have received a great deal of information on signals passed at danger. This information led me to approve the regulations recommended by the Health and Safety Commission to require the fitting of train protection systems.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how the remit of the new railway safety body proposed to replace Railtrack's Safety remit will differ from Railtrack's safety remit; [95936]

(2) what plans he has to re-employ Railtrack safety regulatory staff at the new railway safety body. [95934]

Mr. Prescott *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* We have not proposed a new railway safety body. We are considering all options for how the work of Railtrack's safety and standards directorate might best be carried out.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he first asked for a report on signals passed at danger. [95937]

Mr. Prescott *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* Immediately after the last election I asked for advice on all aspects of rail safety. This was received in June 1997 and included information on measures to stop signals being passed at danger. After discussions with the Health and Safety Commission I made it clear that they should bring forward any formal proposals on (inter alia) automatic train protection that they considered necessary. I signed the resulting regulations in July. In September the HSE announced the result of their audit of the increase in signals passed at danger and 22 specific actions that they required the industry to progress.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he was first informed that the number of red railway signals passed at danger was increasing. [95938]

Mr. Prescott *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* On 9 August the Chief Inspector of Railways informed Ministers of the provisional rail safety statistics for 1998–99, which included the 8 per cent. rise in signals passed at danger. HSE published the statistics on 12 August.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to require maximum capacity limits to be set for passenger train coaches on safety grounds. [96104]

Mr. Hill: Research after the Cannon Street accident in 1991 and more recent research by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) confirms that train overcrowding is not primarily a safety issue but one of passenger discomfort. There is no evidence to suggest that train overcrowding is in itself dangerous, or actually causes accidents. HSE is determined to ensure that, safety is not compromised, as part of improving the railways for passengers. HSE gives high priority to minimising safety concerns in the design of trains arising from congestion at stations.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on which dates signals passed at danger statistics were received by Ministers since September 1998; and what response was given to each notification. [95985]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* Responsibility for providing railway safety statistics (including SPADs) rests with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The Chief Inspector of Railways at the HSE informed Ministers of the annual statistics for 1997–98 (which showed a fall in SPADs) on 7 December 1998. A departmental press notice was published on 9 December 1998 which stressed the need for the railway industry to

improve the safety culture operating in the industry and looked to HSE to use their enforcement powers against companies which skimped on their safety obligations.

On 9 August 1999 the Chief Inspector of Railways informed Ministers of the provisional rail safety statistics for 1998–99, which included an 8 per cent. rise in SPADs. The HSE statistics were published on 12 August. On 30 July the Deputy Prime Minister had signed regulations requiring the fitting of the train protection and warning system to cut the incidence of SPADs. The regulations were laid in the House on 10 August.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports he has received of safety issues concerning the 20.42 Connex train to Dartford via Greenwich on 21 October; and if he will make a statement. [96852]

Mr. Hill: The HSE is aware of the incident on 21 October where the driver of the 20.42 Connex train from Charing Cross to Dartford accepted the route set by the signaller which directed his train onto the line through New Cross instead of going to Greenwich. All the signals were clear and there was therefore no risk to passengers' safety. Implications for the competencies of safety critical staff are being examined.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what reports he has received that the lunar lights on the North Kent line at Charlton are obscured by foliage; and if he will make a statement; [96854]

(2) what reports he has received regarding recent incidents where Connex trains from Dartford to Cannon Street have taken the wrong route; and if he will make a statement. [96853]

Mr. Hill: Although no report has been made to HSE, I understand that on 7 October a Connex train took the wrong route at Charlton because the white route indication lights on the signal were reportedly obscured by foliage. On passing the junction, the driver realised the route had been wrongly set, and under instruction from the signaller, set the train back behind the signal to allow the route to be reset correctly. HSE will now take this matter up with the train operating company.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what arrangements he proposes to put in place in relation to his proposals for National Air Traffic Services to ensure that staff will be able to speak freely about issues relating to safety. [96187]

Mr. Mullin: Staff of National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS) are already given protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. Pursuant to the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order (SI 1999–1549) the CAA is prescribed as a body to which a worker may make a protected disclosure in respect of aviation safety. The CAA has nominated its Secretary and Legal Adviser to be its point of contact. He will protect the complainer's anonymity, while ensuring that the complaint is passed to the relevant regulator. A trade union official who raised safety issues as part of his duties would also enjoy additional protection through the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Two other avenues will continue to be available to NATS staff post partnership who may wish to make a disclosure in respect to aviation safety. First, the Mandatory Occurrence Reporting (MOR) scheme, where an individual is required to report any occurrence which has, or if not corrected would have, endangered an aircraft, its occupants or any other person. The scheme includes an option for the reportee to submit an MOR direct to the safety regulatory authority, without involving local line management. Second is the UK Confidential Human Factors Incident Reporting Programme (CHIRP), which is an independent confidential reporting programme for people employed in the aviation industry to report safety-related incidents and events. In this scheme, the reportees' identities are kept confidential, personal details are not retained and are returned to the reportee.

I have also held a meeting with the NATS unions and the Safety Regulator to discuss safety matters and further meetings are planned with interested parties on this important subject and on other issues related to the PPP.

Habitats Directive

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase the number of special areas of conservation designated under the Habitats Directive; and if he will make a statement. [96106]

Mr. Mullin: None at this time. The UK is currently participating with eight other countries in Atlantic biogeographic region moderation meetings to consider the lists of sites put forward. Following this moderation process the Commission will indicate to member states where modifications to lists are required.

National Walking Strategy

Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the [illegible]nment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to implement the National Walking Strategy. [96194]

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes to implement the National Walking Strategy; and if he will make a statement. [96555]

Mr. Hill: The Government are keen to make it safer and easier for people who choose to walk. A strategy will be published in due course.

"Rights of Way"

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the recommendations contained in the Royal National Institute for the Blind's report, "Rights of Way". [96201]

Mr. Hill: This Report provides a useful overview of the transport needs of visually impaired people. My Department has been working with blind and partially sighted people over many years to improve their independent mobility. It is clear that we are already tackling many of the issues which the Report highlights.

For example, the regulations we are introducing under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requiring access for disabled people to buses, trains and taxis, will include features to meet the needs of visually impaired people. The regulations covering access to trains were introduced from the beginning of this year and in the last few days we concluded the consultation on the draft accessibility regulations for buses and coaches.

We will continue to work with visually impaired people and their organisations to ensure that these improvements, together with greater emphasis on driver training and information, enable blind and partially sighted people to travel with confidence.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to extend the proposed National Minimum Concessionary Fares Scheme for pensioners to blind and partially sighted people. [96199]

Mr. Hill: We have no plans at present to extend the scope of the proposed national minimum standard scheme for people of pensionable age. Local authorities already have powers to provide concessionary travel for people who are blind and partially sighted and many do so. The decision on whether to allow concessionary travel for that group of people will remain a matter for individual local authorities.

Railtrack (Safety)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* evidence he assessed and *(b)* advice he received which underlay his statement that he was minded to relieve Railtrack of its Safety and Standards Directorate. [95939]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* The report from the Health & Safety Commission reviewing SSD, dated 30 September 1999, a copy of which is now in the House Library. Unanimous advice was received from the Transport Select Committee.

Flight Safety

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what central records are kept by (i) his Department and (ii) the CAA of *(a)* Air Accident Investigation Bureau recommendations and *(b)* the resultant actions; and if he will make a statement; [96322]

(2) who is responsible for ensuring that the follow-up action recommended in the CAA flight safety report CAA Occurrence Number 98/04954, (Operator Brintel, AAIB report Bulletin 5/99, CAA factor number F18/99), is implemented. [96321]

Mr. Mullin: Under the Civil Aviation (Investigation of Air Accidents and Incidents) Regulations any undertaking or authority to which a safety recommendation is addressed is required to take the recommendation into consideration without delay and, where appropriate, act upon it. They are also required to provide the Secretary of State with full details of how they intend to implement the recommendation or a full explanation of why they do not intend to implement it. The recommendations referred to were addressed to the US Federal Aviation Administration as the State of Design for the aircraft type in question and we await their response.

Both the Civil Aviation Authority and the Air Accident Investigation Branch keep a record of all recommendations. The AAIB also keeps details of all responses to safety recommendations. In addition, the CAA publishes an annual progress report on recommendations addressed to both the CAA and the Department. It has now been agreed that this progress report will be expanded to include action on all AAIB recommendations.

London Underground

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the public-private partnership for London Underground to be signed for each of the separate groupings of underground lines; and if he will make a statement. [96315]

Mr. Hill: The PPP contracts for London Underground will be signed when they are ready. We have learned the lessons of rail privatisation and will not impose a politically driven timetable at the expense of ensuring that the resulting deal is right.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what immediate action is planned to combat congestion on London Underground trains and in station corridors. [96686]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* This is an operational matter for London Underground. However, London Underground carefully considers customer safety and discomfort from overcrowding in its assessment of investment priorities. Much investment and management effort is focused on reducing delays and improving reliability of the service, which helps reduce congestion both on trains and through stations and provides a safer, more comfortable environment. Examples of investment projects that will combat congestion are: the Jubilee Line Extension; increasing services on the Central and Northern lines; projects at Knightsbridge, Leicester Square, Brixton and Russell Square. In addition, London Underground is focusing on reducing station congestion through better signing and passenger flow management at the busiest stations.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions who is responsible for enforcing London Underground safety rules to combat congestion in trains and corridors. [96688]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Responsibility for managing congestion on London Underground rests with London Underground Ltd. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Railways is informed of any breakdown of congestion management, investigates incidents of serious congestion and monitors general performance in this area.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what safety rules are in operation to prevent overcrowding of *(a)* trains on the London Underground and *(b)* London Underground station corridors. [96687]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* This is an operational matter for London Underground. However, I understand that as part of London Underground's safety management system, comprehensive crowd control plans and measures to implement them are regularly used by London Underground staff when the level of passengers using the system exceeds the system's capacity to deal with them. These safety risk controls are exercised by line controllers and station supervisors. They work in co-operation with each other to ensure that levels of crowding do not exceed safe levels. Staff involved in the implementation of these controls are fully trained. Safety plans are updated annually and regular emergency exercises are held to test the effectiveness of the arrangements.

National Forest

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) by how much the area covered by the National Forest has expanded since 1 May 1997; [96559]

(2) what area was covered by the National Forest on 30 September. [96560]

Mr. Mullin: There has been no change to the designated area of the National Forest since it was established in 1995; 777 hectares of trees have been planted since 1 May 1997. As at 30 September total tree cover in the National Forest amounted to some 5,128 hectares.

Supermarket Developments

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many refusals to grant planning consent for large out of town supermarkets during the past 18 months which were the subject of an appeal have had the refusal upheld. [96314]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. John Greenway, dated 2 November 1999:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about planning appeals for out of town supermarkets where the local planning authority's refusal was upheld over the past 18 months.

In the 18 months to 1 October, one local authority refusal was upheld.

Bus Services (Millennium)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what representations he has received about the availability of bus services over the Millennium period; [96539]

(2) what discussions he has had with transport providers about the availability of bus services over the Millennium period. [96540]

Mr. Hill: I have received very few representations about the availability of bus services. My officials are in touch with the Confederation of Passenger Transport about provision of services, and I understand that their members will be announcing their intended levels of Millennium services outside London in the middle of November. It would be for local authorities to decide whether they wish to supplement commercial provision of services with subsidised services.

The provision of bus services in London is the responsibility of London Transport Buses (LTB). I understand that LTB have formulated a strategy for the Millennium period, which they are discussing with bus operators. It is proposed that on both New Millennium Eve and New Millennium day bus services will broadly operate to Sunday service pattern across London.

PPG17

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish a revised PPG17 on Sports and Recreation. [96878]

Mr. Raynsford: I hope to publish a consultation draft before the end of the year.

Greater Manchester Unitary Development Plans

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what date each local authority in Greater Manchester completed its unitary development plans; and when he finally confirmed each plan. [96874]

Mr. Raynsford: Local planning authorities are responsible for the preparation and adoption of unitary development plans. In Greater Manchester the local planning authorities adopted their unitary development plans on the dates listed in the table:

Local authority	*Date of adoption*
Bolton	December 1995
Bury	August 1997
Manchester	July 1995
Oldham	April 1996
Rochdale	March 1999
Salford	November 1995
Stockport	June 1997
Tameside	September 1996
Trafford	May 1996
Wigan	January 1996

Negative Housing Subsidy

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate his Department has made of the annual financial impact on West Oxfordshire District Council of his changes to the negative housing subsidy regime. [96619]

Mr. Mullin: My Department will be consulting later this Autumn on the detail of the proposals for changes in the Housing Revenue Account subsidy regime. Consideration of the outcome of that exercise will be required before any decisions are taken. It is too early to say what the financial impact of any changes will be. The financial implications for any authority will depend upon both the results of the consultation exercise and conditions pertaining nearer the time that any changes are made.

Campaign for a Northern Assembly

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what public funding the Campaign for a Northern Assembly has received. [96618]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Campaign for a Northern Assembly has received no public funding.

Regional Government

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received, broken down by region, supporting the introduction of elected regional Government in England. [96008]

Ms Armstrong *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* Ministers receive representations in a wide variety of ways—including questions in Parliament, at conferences and during visits and meetings, as well as in writing—and no comprehensive record is kept of all these.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97047]

Ms Armstrong: The Department will apply, in the current financial year, the same method of depreciation as that applied in the 1998–99 financial year dry run resource accounts which is the straight line method. The method applied is commonly used in the private sector.

Greater London Authority

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish detailed proposals for early voting at Greater London Authority elections. [96690]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The Government Office for London wrote to the London Boroughs and the Common Council in August seeking initial comments on outline proposals for a system of early voting at the GLA elections. I have placed a copy of the letter in the House Library. We are considering the responses received, and I hope to write with further detailed proposals shortly.

Thamesmead Town Ltd.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what requests he has received from Thamesmead Town Ltd. for its rented housing stock to be transferred to a registered social landlord or landlords; and if he will make a statement. [96856]

Mr. Mullin: I understand that Thamesmead Town have now applied to the Housing Corporation for registration of the housing association to be established as part of their restructuring proposals as a Registered Social Landlord. The Secretary of State has no plans to make a statement.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what requests he has received for changes to the structure of Thamesmead Town Ltd.; and if he will make a statement [96855]

Mr. Mullin: The Secretary of State has just received a formal request to consent to changes to the structure of Thamesmead Town Ltd. which he will be considering in the coming weeks. He has no plans to make a statement.

Whale Products

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he intends to take to ensure that the ban on the international trade in whale products is not lifted at the next meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Nairobi in April 2000; and if he will make a statement. [96335]

Mr. Mullin: The Government have been consulted recently on two draft downlisting proposals under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), from Norway and Japan, relating respectively to the Northeast Atlantic and North Atlantic Central Stocks, and to the Southern Hemisphere Stocks of Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*). We have replied to both countries making clear our objections and underscoring our opposition to any CITES downlisting proposals which might undermine the moratorium on commercial whaling under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.

Prestwick Airport

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the United Kingdom has gained from the agreement made this summer to allow Fedex fifth freedom rights at Prestwick Airport. [97082]

Mr. Mullin: The decision to grant fifth freedom rights at Prestwick to US air cargo carriers will deliver a range of economic benefits to the airport and to the region. In granting these rights at a single UK airport we have made it clear to the US government that the granting of similar rights at other UK airports is contingent upon the adoption by the US of policies which would afford UK air cargo carriers new opportunities in the US.

Cycles

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how he proposes to ensure better provision of general customer information at cycle facilities provided by Railtrack and rail operators; [97075]

(2) what measures he proposes to ensure that cycles can be carried on trains; [97074]

(3) what plans he has to ensure that secure and weatherproof cycle lockers are introduced at railway stations. [97073]

Mr. Hill: The provision of cycling facilities on trains and at stations is a matter for individual operators. Paragraph 31 of the Instructions and Guidance which we issued to the Franchising Director on 29 September requires him to promote the use of bicycles by seeking

the provision of reasonable facilities on board new rolling stock and at stations. A copy is available in the House Library.

Civil Aviation Agreements

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what representations he has made to the European Commission on his plans to retain UK responsibility for bilateral negotiations with third countries on civil aviation agreements; and if he will make a statement; [97079]

(2) what increase in the EU responsibility for bilateral negotiations with third countries on civil aviation agreements the Government have agreed since 1 May 1997; [97081]

(3) if it is the Government's policy to retain responsibility for bilateral negotiations with third countries on civil aviation agreements indefinitely; [97080]

(4) what representations he has received from the European Commission concerning his Department's present responsibility for bilateral negotiations with third countries on civil aviation agreements; and if he will make a statement. [97078]

Mr. Mullin: The European Commission presented a proposal to open aviation negotiations with the US at Community level in 1997, but to date the Transport Council has not agreed to the proposal. The Commission has brought infraction proceedings in the European Court of Justice against the UK, alleging that the ownership and control clause contained in the UK's bilateral aviation agreement with the US (Bermuda II) breaches the EC Treaty. Similar proceedings have been brought against seven other member states. In common with these other member states, the UK is contesting the case.

The Government believe that the benefits of a Community-wide approach to negotiating air service agreements with third countries need to be considered on a case by case basis and that any decision to grant the Commission a mandate should be justified by reference to the added value of a collective approach.

To date, the Commission has obtained mandates from the Council for three sets of aviation negotiations with third countries: with Norway and Sweden (which were subsequently subsumed by the agreement establishing the European Economic Area and, in the case of Sweden, its accession to the Community); with Switzerland; and with ten Central and Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia). Each of these mandates was granted before 1 May 1997. The Commission has recently made a proposal for a Council decision authorising it to open negotiations with Cyprus.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent discussions his Department has held with its US counterparts concerning the future of US/UK civil aviation agreements; who was present at such meetings; what were the agendas and the conclusions of the meetings; and if he will make a statement. [97076]

Mr. Mullin: My officials held exploratory talks on 18 and 19 October with a delegation from the US State Department, the Department of Transportation, the US Embassy and the FAA. The Director of International Aviation Negotiations led the team of DETR and FCO officials. The primary focus of the meeting was the possible liberalisation of air cargo arrangements, although the delegations also renewed their dialogue on the overall liberalisation of the bilateral aviation relationship. In addition, the US delegation raised the subject of direct air links between Pittsburgh and London. The two sides agreed to consider how further progress may be made.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from United Kingdom airlines concerning the future of UK/US civil aviation agreements. [97077]

Mr. Mullin: I have received representations from a number of airlines and from other bodies concerning UK/US civil aviation agreements. These representations do not reveal a consensus as to the most appropriate way forward for our bilateral discussions, with the Government being pressed by different parties to adopt mutually inconsistent policies.

Local Transport Plans

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the bids made by each local authority in their Provisional Local Transport Plan for the years 2000–01 and 2001–02 for projected local transport capital expenditure on *(a)* maintenance of principal highways, *(b)* maintenance, assessment and strengthening of bridges, *(c)* individual schemes costing more than £5 million and *(d)* individual schemes and groups of related schemes costing less than £5 million. [97087]

Mr. Hill: I have placed a copy of the information requested in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each local authority the submissions given in their Provisional Local Transport Plans for 2000–01 with regard to the targets required under the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997. [97088]

Mr. Hill: We received 85 provisional Local Transport Plans covering 116 English local traffic authorities and 33 interim transport plans from London Boroughs. Authorities were required to include interim non-statutory road traffic reduction reports in their plans. Local authorities have made these plans publicly available.

The reports took a variety of positions on the question of whether, and at what level, to set targets for reducing the level of traffic, or its rate of growth, on local roads. A review of the content of these reports has been carried out as part of the work currently in progress for the Government's first report under the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998 at the end of this year. The results of that review will be made publicly available in due course.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each local authority the proposals for bypasses and other major road schemes made in their provisional local transport plan. [97071]

Mr. Hill: We have received 85 provisional local transport plans covering 116 local highway authorities in England, excluding London. Specific proposals for major road schemes costing more than £5 million with potential start dates within the five year local transport plan period (2000–1 to 2004–5) are as follows:

Authority	*Scheme*
Bedfordshire	A507 Ridgmont Bypass and Woburn Link
	Bedford Western Bypass
Cambridgeshire	A142 Fordham Bypass
Essex	A131 Great Leighs Bypass
Hertfordshire	Baldock Bypass
Norfolk	Broome and Ellingham Bypass
	Great Yarmouth A47/A149 Link Road
Suffolk	Stowmarket B1115 Relief Road
	South Lowestoft Relief Road and Related Measures
Derby City	Derby Spur Extension
Derbyshire	Markham Employment Growth Zone
Leicestershire	Ashby Bypass Stage 2
Nottinghamshire	A617 Mansfield Ashfield Regeneration Route
	A6002/A6007 Coventry Lane Improvement
Rutland	Oakham Bypass
Darlington	Darlington Cross Town Route Eastern Section
Stockton-on-Tees	South Stockton Link
Cheshire	A34 Alderley Edge Environmental Bypass
Cumbria	Carlisle Northern Development Route
Liverpool	Hall Lane Area Improvement
Salford	Manchester Salford Inner Relief Route
Wirral	Birkenhead Town Link Diversion
Buckinghamshire	A4146 Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western Bypass
East Sussex	Newhaven Port Access Road
	Bexhill and Hastings Link Roads
Kent	East Kent Access (Phases 1 and 2)
Medway	A228 Chattenden to Ropers Lane
Surrey	A244 Cross Thames Transport Corridor
Bristol	A4 Bath Road to Callington Road Link
Cornwall	Grampound Bypass
Devon	Barnstaple Western Bypass
Dorset	Weymouth Transportation and Regeneration Project
Gloucestershire	A436 Shipton Solers to Air Balloon Improvement
Somerset	Brigdewater Northern Distributor
Wiltshire	Western Wiltshire Regeneration Corridor
Birmingham	Northfield Regeneration Scheme
	Selly Oak Access Road
Sandwell	Cradley Heath Town Centre Strategy (A4100) (A)
Shropshire	A53 Hodnet Bypass
Staffordshire	Burntwood Bypass
	Biddulph Bypass
	Rugeley Eastern Bypass Stage 2
Stoke-on-Trent	Hanley Bentilee Link
	City Centre Link
Warwickshire	Barford Bypass
Worcestershire	Wyre Piddle Bypass
Barnsley	Coalfields Link Road Phases 2 and 3
	Cudworth By Pass
Doncaster	A6023 Denaby Main Diversion
Leeds	East Leeds Link Road
	Leeds Inner Ring Road
N. East Lincolnshire	South Humber Bank Link Road (Stage 2)
Rotherham	West Bawtry Road Improvement
	A57(T) Todwick Crossroads to M1 J31
Sheffield	Inner Relief Road—Stages 2 and 3
North Yorkshire	Scarborough Integrated Transport Scheme

Quality Contracts

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is Government policy to make quality contracts subject to ministerial consent; and if he will make a statement. [97072]

Mr. Hill: Government procurement policy is to award contracts on the basis of best value for money, which is the optimum combination of whole life cost and quality. The vast majority of contracting decisions are taken by DETR officials without reference to Ministers.

Land Disposal

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is towards disposal of land held by local authorities under the Green Belts (London and Home Counties) Act 1938 and towards the treatment of any proceeds. [97206]

Mr. Raynsford: I will approve the disposal of land only where it will continue to fulfil the purposes of including land in Green Belts as set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 2 (PPG2). Any capital receipt arising from a disposal should be treated according to the local government capital finance system.

Local Authorities (Reorganisation)

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources he will make available to authorities that have been reorganised on 1 April 1997 and 1998 for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [97208]

Ms Armstrong: On 16 July I invited authorities that reorganised on 1 April 1997 and 1 April 1998 to submit estimates of the amount of expenditure they expect to incur on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1999–2000. On the basis of the information provided by authorities, I have decided the revised maximum amounts that it would be appropriate to allocate towards such costs in 1999–2000.

The amounts are as follows:

Maximum amounts: £000 (rounded)

Authority	*1999–2000*
1997 Reorganisations	
Luton Borough Council	200
Milton Keynes Council	'No bid
Derby City Council	920
Bournemouth Borough Council	1,160
Poole Borough Council	'No bid
Darlington Borough Council	1,405
Brighton & Hove District Council	'No bid
Portsmouth City Council	1,307
Southampton City Council	3,026
Leicester City Council	'No bid
Rutland Council	2,100
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	1,007
Swindon Borough Council	559
Total	11,684

Maximum amounts: £000 (rounded)

Authority	*1999–2000*
1998 Reorganisations	
Bracknell Forest Council	[1]No bid
West Berkshire Council	1,185
Reading Borough Council	4,879
Slough Borough Council	4,910
Windsor & Maidenhead Council	[1]No bid
Wokingham District Council	2,258
County of Hertfordshire District Council	4,545
Worcestershire County Council	1,460
Malvern Hills Council	[1]No bid
Plymouth City Council	5,026
Torbay Borough Council	4,268
Southend on Sea Council	[1]No bid
Thurrock Borough Council	2,423
Nottingham City Council	2,092
Halton Borough Council	1,698
Warrington Borough Council	[1]No bid
Telford & Wrekin District Council	780
Medway Borough Council	4,643
Peterborough City Council	770
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	1,503
Blackpool Borough Council	1,150
Total	43,590
Combined total allocations	55,274

[1] Milton Keynes, Poole, Brighton & Hove, Leicester City, Bracknell Forest, Windsor & Maidenhead, Malvern Hills, Southend on Sea and Warrington did not submit bids for SCA.

DEFENCE

Equipment (Detection)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment is currently available that would detect from a low-flying aircraft the likely presence of *(a)* a shallow grave containing human remains, *(b)* buried arms or munitions and *(c)* an underground tunnel of less than 15 foot depth; how many such devices and at what cost have been purchased by HM forces; and how these devices have been deployed in the past 12 months. [94627]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The MOD has a number of surveillance sensors that can be mounted on low-flying aircraft. These are designated to provide intelligence information on surface features and activities. They would, in some circumstances, be capable of detecting recently disturbed earth but they could not directly detect the likely presence of buried remains, arms of munitions. There is, however, ongoing research both in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and in the private sector into the development of ground penetrating radar for airborne applications.

Type 42s

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expected in-service date is for the Type 42 replacement ships; and if he will make a statement. [94781]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 20 October 1999]:* The requirement to replace the Royal Navy's Type 42 Destroyers will now be met by the Type 45 destroyer programme. On current plans, the first of the Type 45 destroyers will enter service in 2007.

Anti-Air Missile System

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the practicability of the Principal Anti-Air Missile system to surplus Batch 2 Type 22 frigates pending the introduction of the Type 45 destroyer; and if he will make a statement. [96034]

Mr. Spellar: No assessment has been conducted into the practicality of integrating the Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS) into Type 22 Batch 2 frigates. The timescale of the PAAMS procurement programme means that it could not be ready for service on a type 22 (or any other vessel) before the Type 45's entry into service.

Vertical Launcher

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the practicability of incorporating the US Mk 41 vertical launcher in the Type 45 destroyer; and if he will make a statement. [96033]

Mr. Spellar: An assessment was made of both the French SYLVER Vertical Launch System (VLS) and the Lockheed Martin Mk41 (Tactical length) VLS for the Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS) requirement. The French SYLVER was competitively selected, in preference to the Lockheed Martin Mk41. While the assessment concluded that both options would meet the PAAMS requirement and technically could be incorporated into the Type 45, the PAAMS package which offered the SYLVER launcher was chosen on the grounds of overall affordability and value for money.

Forces Personnel (Divorce)

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what circumstances his Department will pay the legal costs of armed forces personnel in divorce proceedings; and for what ranks. [96431]

Mr. Spellar: Divorce is considered to be a personal and private issue between the individuals concerned. It is not considered appropriate, therefore, that such costs should be borne by the public purse. However, Armed Forces personnel serving in Northern Ireland or overseas can obtain free legal advice on procedure from the Army Legal Service. Similarly, their spouses can receive free advice from the RAF Legal Service.

Missiles (Turkey)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of the missiles being loaned to Turkey; and how long the missiles are being loaned for. [96472]

Mr. Spellar: The value of the missiles that the MOD plans to loan to Turkey is approximately £1.2 million; the missiles are being loaned for a period of approximately three years.

Nuclear Weapons (Millennium Compliance)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with Governments of countries which possess nuclear weapons about management of weapons systems in relation to millennium compliance. [96549]

Mr. Hoon: We have been assured by all the other Nuclear Weapon States (US, Russia, France and China) that their nuclear weapons will be unaffected by the Year 2000 problem, and that robust command and control arrangements are in place. We have provided similar assurances in respect of our own nuclear deterrent.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will institute a full public inquiry into the health and safety, environmental and pollution aspects of the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston and Burghfield; [96671]

(2) what action in the past year he has caused to be taken to reduce the risk of a nuclear accident at Aldermaston. [96670]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Kosovo

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the amount of uranium dust in Kosovo from depleted uranium rounds; and what action he proposes to take to manage the risk to public health. [96668]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Depleted uranium based munitions have not been used by British forces in Kosovo and the Government have not commissioned any assessment of the amount of uranium dust in Kosovo. I am, however, very much aware of the concerns that have been expressed about the use of depleted uranium in ammunition and have commissioned advice from officials within the MOD on how we might improve our knowledge of how depleted uranium in ammunition behaves in the natural environment. I have also asked for a review of any health effects of depleted uranium.

The joint UN Environment Programme/UN Commission on Human Settlements issued its report "The Kosovo Conflict: Consequences for the Environment" on 5 October 1999. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library of the House.

Homosexuals

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if legislation would be required in order to lift the ban on homosexuals serving in the armed forces. [96891]

Mr. Spellar: No.

Serviceability Targets

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the percentage serviceability target in 1999 for equipment being required to be available within 12 hours for *(a)* RAF aircraft, *(b)* army tanks and *(c)* other battle vehicles. [95965]

Mr. Spellar: The Army do not set serviceability targets for equipment being required to be available within 12 hours. The percentage serviceability target in 1999 for equipment being required to be available within 24 hours is 90 per cent. for main battle tanks and an average of 80 per cent. across the range of other armoured vehicles.

The information requested on RAF aircraft is not held centrally but is being collated. I will write to the right hon. and learned Member when it is available and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Establishment Strength

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the establishment strength of *(a)* Tornado GR1/4, *(b)* Tornado F3, *(c)* Harrier, *(d)* Jaguar, *(e)* Nimrod, *(f)* Sentry, *(g)* Tristar, *(h)* Puma, *(i)* Sea King and *(j)* Chinook; how many were (i) allocated to front-line units, (ii) fully serviceable, (iii) unserviceable 1 line, (iv) unserviceable 2 line, (v) unserviceable 3 line, (vi) unserviceable 4 line and (vii) held in reserve use on 1 October; and what percentage of the establishment strength this represents for each category. [95967]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the right hon. and learned Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the establishment strength of *(a)* Warrior variants, *(b)* Challenger 1, *(c)* Challenger 2, *(d)* Saxon variants, *(e)* AVF 430 variants, *(f)* Sabre, *(g)* Striker, *(h)* Scimitar, *(i)* Spartan, *(j)* Sultan, *(k)* Samaritan and *(l)* Samson; how many were (i) allocated to front-line units, (ii) fully operational, (iii) unserviceable-fully operational in 24 hours, (iv) unserviceable-fully operational in seven days and (v) unserviceable-fully operational in more than seven days on 1 October; and what percentage of the establishment strength this represents for each category. [95966]

Mr. Spellar: Information on the availability state of armoured vehicles in the form requested, specifically the numbers of vehicles held by frontline units together with the numbers that are operational, is classified. I am therefore withholding this information under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Defence, Security and International Relations). Information on availability of armoured vehicles allocated to frontline Army units by percentage of establishment strength is however, unclassified. The following table shows availability in this form on 30 September 1999, the most recent date for which figures are available.

Vehicle type	*Percentage of establishment fully operational*	*Percentage of establishment fully operational in 24 hours*
Warrior variants	64	70
Challenger 1 Main Battle Tank	39	46
Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank	65	70
Saxon variants	61	69
Fighting Vehicle 430 variants	62	73
Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) Sabre	80	83
Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) Striker	55	60
Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) Scimitar	69	74

Vehicle type	Percentage of establishment fully operational	Percentage of establishment fully operational in 24 hours
Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) Spartan	76	88
Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) Sultan	74	88
Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) Samaritan	68	73
Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked) Samson	65	67

Notes:

1. AVF 430 has been taken to include 430 variants;
2. All six Warrior variants have been included under the term "Warrior",
3. All five Saxon variants have been included under the term "Saxon",
4. Frontline Army units have been taken to mean those of 1(UK) Armoured Division, 3(UK) Division (under Operational Command), and Regular Units of the Reconnaissance Brigade.

We do not collect availability data on the number of vehicles which are either "unserviceable-fully operational in seven days" or "unserviceable-fully operational in more than seven days" and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ILO Convention

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of Article 3 (d) of the new ILO convention on child labour on his Department's employment and deployment practices; and if he will make a statement. [96014]

Mr. Spellar: The new ILO Convention 182 explicitly mentions the "forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict" at Article 3(a). Article 3(d) therefore has no application to military service in the UK. The recruitment practices referred to in ILO Convention 182 are an unacceptable form of child labour. The recruitment of genuine volunteers, as for example undertaken in the UK, is entirely different from the abusive, exploitative, forced or coercive involvement of children in armed conflict as members of militia or para-military forces around the world.

Military Personnel

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of serving military personnel in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Navy and *(c)* the RAF are (i) single, (ii) married without children, (iii) married with children, (iv) divorced without children and (v) divorced with children. [95959]

Mr. Spellar: Due to differences in the data held by the services, the answer has been split by office and servicemen/women.

As at 1 October, the latest date for which figures are available, the percentages are:

Percentage

	Naval Service	Army	RAF
Officers			
Single	31.8	35.1	24.2
Married without children	15.4	[1]63.4	[2]73.7
Married with children	49.8		
Divorced without children	0.3	[1]1.4	1.2
Divorced with children	2.5		0.9
Servicemen/Women			
Single	48.6	50.9	34.3
Married without children	19.0	14.5	[2]61.7
Married with children	26.7	31.7	
Divorced without children	1.1	1.3	2.3
Divorced with children	3.9	1.6	1.6

[1] The Army do not hold data on dependants of officers
[2] The RAF do not hold data on dependants of married personnel

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the number of military personnel stationed at each base, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Navy and *(c)* the RAF; which of these bases have an officer in charge of families; and what recreational, social, medical and educational facilities are available at each base for forces families; [95960]

(2) if he will list the organisations dedicated to service family welfare and support for *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Navy and *(c)* the RAF; which of the organisations received MOD funding in each year between and including 1989 and the current financial year, indicating the amounts received; and what proportion of the organisations' budget this represented. [95962]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the right hon. and learned Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of military personnel leaving *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Navy and *(c)* the RAF for reasons of (i) premature voluntary release, (ii) redundancy, (iii) retirement and (iv) other, for each year between and including 1989 and the current financial year indicating what percentage of each category were (1) single, (2) married without children, (3) married with children, (4) divorced without children and (5) divorced with children. [95961]

Mr. Spellar: The available information is contained in the tables:

Naval Service [1] outflow by type of outflow and marital status—all ranks 1989–90 to 1999–2000

	PVR [2]	Redundancy	Retirement	Other	Total
1989–90					
Total Outflow	4,578	3	1,143	2,278	8,002
Single[3]	57.2%	—	7.6%	79.2%	56.4%
Married	39.7%	66.7%	85.5%	18.8%	40.3%
Divorced/Separated[4]	3.1%	33.3%	6.9%	2.0%	3.3%

Naval Service [1] outflow by type of outflow and marital status—all ranks 1989–90 to 1999–2000

	PVR [2]	Redundancy	Retirement	Other	Total
1990–91					
Total Outflow	4,855	—	993	2,227	8,075
Single [3]	58.2%	—	7.5%	80.6%	58.2%
Married	38.6%	—	86.5%	17.7%	38.7%
Divorced/Separated [4]	3.2%	—	6.0%	1.6%	3.1%
1991–92					
Total Outflow	3,649	—	948	2,129	6,726
Single [3]	64.7%	—	7.7%	82.2%	62.2%
Married	32.1%	—	83.8%	16.2%	34.3%
Divorced/Separated [4]	3.2%	—	8.5%	1.7%	3.5%
1992–93					
Total Outflow	1,898	380	1,110	1,730	5,118
Single [3]	64.2%	11.3%	8.7%	78.4%	53.0%
Married	32.3%	80.5%	82.6%	19.8%	42.6%
Divorced/Separated [4]	3.4%	8.2%	8.6%	1.8%	4.4%
1993–94					
Total Outflow	1,417	1,253	1,119	1,239	5,028
Single [3]	71.5%	18.4%	9.6%	73.0%	44.8%
Married	25.6%	72.9%	82.1%	23.9%	49.5%
Divorced/Separated [4]	2.9%	8.7%	8.3%	3.1%	5.6%
1994–95					
Total Outflow	1,192	2,351	1,315	1,202	6,060
Single [3]	69.5%	43.3%	8.5%	70.0%	46.2%
Married	27.8%	50.0%	82.5%	27.1%	48.2%
Divorced/Separated [4]	2.7%	6.7%	9.0%	2.8%	5.6%
1995–96					
Total Outflow	1,634	522	1,443	1,229	4,828
Single [3]	70.9%	34.9%	9.6%	68.3%	48.0%
Married	25.6%	57.1%	81.2%	28.2%	46.3%
Divorced/Separated [4]	3.5%	8.0%	9.1%	3.6%	5.7%
1996–97					
Total Outflow	2,347	1,836	444	1,490	7,117
Single [3]	75.1%	41.1%	9.0%	73.3%	52.5%
Married	22.8%	52.6%	81.3%	23.3%	42.5%
Divorced/Separated [4]	2.1%	6.3%	9.7%	3.4%	5.0%
1997–98					
Total Outflow	2,427	—	1,428	1,415	5,270
Single [3]	72.2%	—	9.8%	71.4%	55.1%
Married	25.1%	—	80.9%	24.5%	40.1%
Divorced/Separated [4]	2.7%	—	9.3%	4.0%	4.8%
1998–99					
Total Outflow	2,514	—	1,415	1,694	5,623
Single [3]	70.7%	—	9.6%	73.9%	56.3%
Married	26.5%	—	81.2%	21.8%	38.8%
Divorced/Separated [4]	2.8%	—	9.2%	%4.3	4.9%
1999–2000 [5]					
Total Outflow	1,279	—	703	940	2,922
Single [3]	68.3%	—	8.8%	76.4%	56.6%
Married	29.0%	—	78.8%	19.3%	37.9%
Divorced/Separated [4]	2.7%	—	12.4%	4.4%	5.6%

[1] Data comprises Royal Navy and Royal Marines.
[2] PVR stands for Premature Voluntary Release.
[3] 'Single' comprises single and widowed personnel.
[4] It is not possible to separate divorced from separated Naval personnel using the information available.
[5] 1999–2000 data are those currently available for this financial year, i.e. 1 April 1999 to 30 September 1999
[6] indicates zero.

Note:
Percentages are rounded to one decimal place, so totals may not equal exactly 100 per cent.

Source:
DASA (Tri-Service)

Army Outflow by type of outflow and marital status—other ranks 1993–94 to 1999–2000

	PVR [1]	Redundancy	Retirement	Other	Total
1993–94					
Total Outflow	5,590	5,131	3,040	4,890	18,651
Single[2]	60.0%	8.6%	6.4%	88.4%	44.6%
Married without children	19.8%	10.6%	6.3%	4.6%	11.1%
Married with children	18.1%	74.7%	81.9%	6.3%	41.0%
Divorced without children	0.8%	1.9%	1.0%	0.3%	1.0%
Divorced with children	1.2%	4.2%	4.4%	0.4%	2.3%
1994–95					
Total Outflow	6,392	6,171	2,470	4,909	19,942
Single[2]	58.4%	18.3%	7.2%	88.5%	47.1%
Married without children	18.5%	16.8%	6.5%	4.2%	12.9%
Married with children	20.6%	59.6%	81.1%	6.6%	36.7%
Divorced without children	1.2%	1.8%	1.0%	0.4%	1.1%
Divorced with children	1.3%	3.5%	4.3%	0.4%	2.1%
1995–96					
Total Outflow	6,528	103	2,229	5,294	14,154
Single[2]	57.2%	34.0%	13.6%	86.5%	61.1%
Married without children	19.1%	14.6%	8.8%	5.2%	12.2%
Married with children	21.3%	48.5%	71.8%	7.7%	24.3%
Divorced without children	1.0%	1.0%	1.6%	0.3%	0.8%
Divorced with children	1.4%	1.9%	4.2%	0.4%	1.5%
1996–97					
Total Outflow	5,857	112	1,769	6,521	14,259
Single[2]	55.1%	16.1%	17.1%	86.7%	64.5%
Married without children	19.7%	26.8%	8.5%	5.0%	11.6%
Married with children	22.2%	50.9%	68.6%	7.4%	21.4%
Divorced without children	1.7%	5.4%	2.4%	0.4%	1.2%
Divorced with children	1.3%	0.9%	3.3%	0.5%	1.2%
1997–98					
Total Outflow	5,767	[4]—	1,571	6,010	13,348
Single[2]	51.2%	[4]—	11.0%	85.7%	62.0%
Married without children	20.0%	[4]—	8.9%	5.1%	12.0%
Married with children	25.4%	[4]—	74.1%	8.4%	23.5%
Divorced without children	1.7%	[4]—	2.2%	0.5%	1.2%
Divorced with children	1.7%	[4]—	3.8%	0.4%	1.4%
1998–99					
Total Outflow	5,965	1	1,720	7,976	15,662
Single[2]	50.2%	[4]—	13.6%	90.0%	66.5%
Married without children	20.1%	100.0%	9.9%	3.4%	10.5%
Married with children	26.4%	[4]—	68.7%	5.9%	20.6%
Divorced without children	1.4%	[4]—	3.1%	0.4%	1.1%
Divorced with children	1.8%	[4]—	4.7%	0.4%	1.4%
1999–2000 [3]					
Total Outflow	2,581	[4]—	879	3,719	7,179
Single[2]	52.2%	[4]—	8.5%	90.3%	66.6%
Married without children	19.2%	[4]—	9.4%	3.6%	9.9%
Married with children	24.8%	[4]—	75.0%	5.3%	20.8%
Divorced without children	1.8%	[4]—	2.0%	0.4%	1.1%
Divorced with children	2.1%	[4]—	5.0%	0.3%	1.5%

[1] PVR stands for Premature Voluntary Release.
[2] 'Single' comprises single and widowed personnel.
[3] 1999–2000 data are those currently available for this financial year, i.e. 1 April 1999 to 30 September 1999.
[4] indicates zero.
Note:
Percentages are rounded to one decimal place, so totals may not equal exactly 100 per cent.
Source:
DASA (Tri-Service)

Royal Air Force outflows by type of outflow and marital status—other ranks 1993–94 to 1999–2000

	PVR [1]	Redundancy	Retirement [2]	Other	Total
1993–94					
Total Outflow	1,285	908	2,161	513	4,867
Single[3]	33.8%	5.0%	21.2%	59.6%	25.5%
Married[4]	63.3%	89.6%	74.6%	38.6%	70.6%
Divorced[5] without children	2.0%	2.6%	2.1%	1.8%	2.2%
Divorced[5] with children	0.9%	2.8%	2.1%	[7]—	1.7%

Royal Air Force outflows by type of outflow and marital status—other ranks 1993–94 to 1999–2000

	PVR [1]	Redundancy	Retirement [2]	Other	Total
1994–95					
Total Outflow	1,443	1,416	1,620	522	5,001
Single[3]	35.0%	7.3%	22.2%	56.5%	25.3%
Married[4]	60.7%	87.2%	74.0%	40.4%	70.4%
Divorced[5] without children	3.0%	2.5%	2.0%	1.3%	2.4%
Divorced[5] with children	1.2%	3.0%	1.9%	1.7%	2.0%
1995–96					
Total Outflow	1,856	2,380	2,352	694	7,282
Single[3]	35.9%	17.9%	25.0%	62.4%	29.0%
Married[4]	61.3%	75.9%	70.4%	34.1%	66.4%
Divorced[5] without children	1.9%	3.4%	3.2%	2.0%	2.9%
Divorced with children	0.9%	2.8%	1.4%	1.4%	1.7%
1996–97					
Total Outflow	1,565	4,625	2,260	694	9,144
Single[3]	35.7%	14.5%	26.9%	63.7%	24.9%
Married[4]	60.0%	79.6%	68.2%	34.0%	70.0%
Divorced[5] without children	2.5%	3.3%	2.7%	1.6%	2.9%
Divorced[5] with children	1.9%	2.6%	2.1%	0.7%	2.2%
1997–98					
Total Outflow	1,617	4	1,630	728	3,979
Single[3]	37.3%	25.0%	23.7%	64.1%	36.6%
Married[4]	59.0%	50.0%	71.0%	33.5%	59.3%
Divorced[5] without children	2.7%	25.0%	3.3%	0.4%	2.5%
Divorced[5] with children	1.1%	[7]—	2.0%	1.9%	1.6%
1998–99					
Total Outflow	1,829	[7]—	1,594	807	4,230
Single[3]	34.3%	[7]—	23.0%	75.6%	37.9%
Married[4]	61.5%	[7]—	71.4%	22.6%	57.8%
Divorced[5] without children	2.8%	[7]—	3.2%	0.7%	2.6%
Divorced[5] with children	1.4%	[7]—	2.4%	1.1%	1.7%
1999–2000					
Total Outflow	1,017	[7]—	670	410	2,097
Single[3]	32.7%	[7]—	19.0%	75.9%	36.8%
Married[4]	62.6%	[7]—	75.5%	23.2%	59.0%
Divorced[5] without children	2.6%	[7]—	2.7%	0.7%	2.2%
Divorced[5] with children	2.1%	[7]—	2.8%	0.2%	2.0%

[1] PVR stands for Premature Voluntary Release.
[2] Retirement comprises all service personnel reaching the end of their engagement (i.e. Those at age 55 or 47, or those completing 22, 15, 12 and 9 year engagements).
[3] 'Single' comprises single and widowed personnel.
[4] 'Married' comprises married, legally separated, divorce nisi and estranged/mutually separated.
[5] 'Divorced' comprises divorce absolute. 'Divorced with children' only includes those who are supporting children; there may be personnel with children who have either finished full time education or who are over 18 included in 'Divorced without children'.
[6] 1999–2000 data are those currently available for this financial year, i.e. 1 April 1999 to 30 September 1999.
[7] Indicates zero.

Note:
Percentages are rounded to one decimal place, so totals may not equal exactly 100 per cent.
Source:
DASA (Tri-Service)

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies or tests are currently being undertaken by or on behalf of the MOD into non-radioactive or contaminating substitutes for depleted uranium weapons and armour; and if he will make a statement. [95964]

Mr. Spellar: MOD has for many years conducted research into a range of weapon and armour materials and designs. Depleted uranium provides a significant margin of operational effectiveness over other materials when employed in certain weapon systems. Research continues to include the search for potential alternatives to depleted uranium and to identify and characterise their performance and environmental impact.

Army

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve retention in the Army; and if he will make a statement. [97207]

Mr. Spellar: The Government inherited a shortfall in Army manpower, and recognise that improved retention is key to realising the goal to full manning. In line with

the targets set in the SDR, they are committed to achieving that improvement and a number of initiatives are underway.

In recognition of the increasingly expeditionary nature of our tasks the operational welfare package has been improved and the Service Families Task Force is addressing a variety of issues which create domestic difficulties for our personnel. The Army's Human Resources Strategy includes a six-month review of the effectiveness of present Army retention policies. This work, which is being conducted by external consultants will listen to a wide range of opinions and make recommendations for improvements in the Army's personnel management policies.

We are also keeping operational commitments under close review. Our determination to ease the burden on the Army is demonstrated by the significant reduction in force levels in Bosnia announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 26 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *768*.

In addition we have considered whether the minimum commitment for soldiers of only three years provides the best return for the Army and the best opportunities for the individual. We have concluded that it should be raised to four years. This will make a significant contribution to the Army's ability to fulfil its obligations and liabilities as set out in the SDR manning target. It will also allow more time for the individual to benefit from the excellent training and development opportunities in the Army, including the acquisition of new skills and recognised civilian and professional qualifications.

Iraq (No-fly Zones)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost to his Department of maintaining and prosecuting the defence of the northern and southern no-fly zones in Iraq each year since 1992, including projected figures for 1999; and if he will make a statement. [95970]

Mr. Hoon: Our records do not separately identify expenditure incurred in maintaining the no-fly zones. However, the table sets out the overall additional expenditure incurred by my Department as a direct result of operations in the Gulf from 1992–93 onwards.

	£ million
1992–93	551
1993–94	179
1994–95	58
1995–96	14
1996–97	6
1997–98	16
1998–99	35
1999–2000 (estimate)	28

Coalition patrols of the no-fly zones remain an essential humanitarian task in support of UN Security Council Resolution 688 as they prevent Saddam Hussein from using his airforce against the Iraqi people in the north and south. Since the end of Operation Desert Fox last December, Saddam has waged a systematic campaign against coalition aircraft carrying out these patrols. Some 215 Iraqi aircraft have violated the No-fly Zones, and there have been over 500 other direct threats against our aircrew, including missile attacks and heavy anti-aircraft fire. Coalition responses are limited strictly to proportionate action in self-defence against Iraqi weapons and facilities, which pose a direct threat to our forces.

Tomahawk Missiles

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* planned order and *(b)* date of completion for each adaptation of Astute and Trafalgar class submarines to fire Tomahawk missiles; and if he will make a statement. [95968]

Mr. Hoon: The adaptation of HMS Triumph to fire Tomahawk missiles was completed earlier this year. Work on HMS Trafalgar is in hand. It is currently planned that the adaptation of the remaining Trafalgar Class submarines will be completed by about 2006.

HMS Astute and all subsequent submarines in this class are planned to be built Tomahawk-capable. The first three boats of the Astute Class are due to enter service between 2005 and 2008.

The precise order and date of adaptation of Trafalgar Class submarines would assist in deducing the availability of TLAM-capable boats for operational deployment, given the limited number of submarines involved. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the United Kingdom total requirement for Block III Tomahawk missiles; how many have been *(a)* delivered and *(b)* used; and when he expects the Royal Navy to have the full complement of missiles required. [95969]

Mr. Hoon: The UK originally contracted to buy 65 Tomahawk missiles. Knowledge of the delivery schedule and the number used would assist a potential adversary to assess our stock level and operational capability. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns *199–200*, when the contract was signed with the United States Department of Defense for the replenishment on RN Tomahawk missiles; what are the delivery terms of the contract; how many replacement missiles will be purchased; at what cost to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [95974]

Mr. Hoon: A contract for 20 Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles was signed on 1 August 1999. The cost will be met from the Reserve. Knowledge of the delivery schedule would assist a potential adversary to assess our stock level and operational capability. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

HEALTH

Thermal Insulation Standards

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the recommended thermal insulation standard for pipework and ducting in his Department's PFI programmes; and in what proportion of contracts this standard is met. [94887]

Mr. Denham: National Health Service Estates "Model Engineering Specification CO2: Thermal Insulation" specifies recommended insulation standards. The guidance is not mandatory and it is for NHS trusts to determine what is required for each scheme.

The Department does not hold information on what proportion of contracts meet this standard.

Correspondence

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department will reply to the letters of the hon. Member for Ashford of 22 April, 26 May, 12 July and 2 September concerning the case of Dr. A. Singh. [96107]

Mr. Denham: I regret that due to an administrative error, the hon. Member's letter of 22 April was misfiled. I replied today.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the aggregate increase in uniform business rates payable by all NHS trusts and health authorities in England and Wales from 1 April 2000 as a result of the 2000 rating revaluation. [96256]

Mr. Denham: The draft rating list will be published in December. The cost of unified business rates for the National Health Service in England will be dependent on the rate poundage and the extent of transitional relief. Decisions on these will be taken in January.

Disclosure of any provisional assessment of the impact of the rating revaluation is considered to be commercially sensitive and so premature disclosure would be inappropriate.

Information relating to Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend, the First Secretary to the National Assembly for Wales.

Elderly Patients

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which general medical practice has the highest proportion of patients aged 85 years and over. [96325]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

At 1 October 1998, in England as a whole, 7.3 per cent. of patients were aged 75 and over. A total of 34 practices had more than 20 per cent. of patients aged 75 and over. The distribution of these practices by health authority is shown in the table.

Practices in England with more than 20 per cent. of patients aged 75 and over, by Health authority, 1 October 1998

Region	*Health authority*	*Number of practices*
Anglian and North Thames	North West Anglia	1
	Hillingdon	1
	North Essex	4
South Thames	Bromley	1
	East Kent	3
	East Sussex	7
	Brighton and West Sussex	4
South and West	Dorset	6
	North and East Devon	2
	Somerset	2
	South and West Devon	1
North West	Morecambe Bay	
	South Cheshire	1

Source:
Department of Health General Medical Services Statistics

Elderly (Long-term Care)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision the Government are making for residential and nursing care for the elderly in each of the next three years. [96754]

Mr. Hutton: We do not set a specific amount aside for residential and nursing care for the elderly. This is for health authorities and local authorities to decide upon, from within their overall budgets. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the total amount available to the National Health Service and to local authorities for 1999–2000 to 2001–02 in July 1998 when he published the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Copies are available in the Library.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow local authority social services to relocate elderly people in care without consulting next of kin; and if he will make a statement. [96751]

Mr. Hutton: None.

When relocation is being considered, we expect local authorities to consult with and take into account the views of the older people concerned, as well as their relatives or carers.

NHS Direct

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the possibility of advertising NHS Direct on radio; and if he will make a statement. [96535]

Ms Stuart: We have recently received a letter from the Radio Advertising Bureau about NHS Direct advertising on radio.

It is important that the public has clear information about all NHS services. Radio advertising has been used in the past to widen public access to NHS Direct in particular.

Officials are talking to the Radio Authority to ensure radio advertising remains an option for providing information about NHS Direct in the future.

NHS Pay Review Body

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include *(a)* professional health groups and *(b)* pharmacists, radiographers and medical laboratory scientists on the NHS Pay Review Body. [96275]

Mr. Denham: On 15 February 1999, the Health Departments published proposals for modernising the National Health Service pay system in "Agenda for Change." This included the possibility of moving some highly qualified health professionals into the remit of the Nurses, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine Review Body (NPRB).

Initial discussions with NHS trade unions on pay modernisation were completed successfully on 5 October and resulted in a Joint Framework of Principles and Agreed Statement on the Way Forward which was published on 8 October, copies of which are available in the Library. Paragraph 7.2 of the Joint Framework identifies, as a starting point for more detailed discussions with trade unions, the qualifying criteria for groups of staff to come within the scope of the NPRB.

The criteria are

"Professions with a minimum entry requirement of three years' educational study (or equivalent) to diploma level or higher, in a health specific area (other than medicine or dentistry) and which are state registered and have a substantial majority of members employed in healthcare."

Exceptions might be agreed for staff groups which meet the majority but not all of these conditions.

Staff groups which support professions added to the NPRB remit, and who have a direct connection with the transferred groups similar to that between nursing auxiliaries and registered nurses would also need to be considered for transfer.

No change will take place until all aspects of the new pay system are agreed. The joint target for agreement is summer 2000.

Radiographers are already covered by the NPRB.

Euthanasia

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the differences between his policies in relation to the removal of assisted nutrition and hydration from *(a)* patients in persistent vegetative state and *(b)* other mentally incapacitated patients; what plans he has for changes to the law or practice in relation to such matters; and if he will make a statement. [96518]

Mr. Hutton: The removal of artificial nutrition and hydration is in all cases a matter of clinical judgment which is undertaken in accordance with professional advice provided by a responsible and recognised body of medical opinion and the general law. There are no plans to change the law in this respect.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the numbers of mentally incapable adults in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom in each of the last three years whose death could have been brought about by the removal of artificial nutrition and hydration if such removal were legally sanctioned (i) without recourse to the courts for such patients not in persistent vegetative state and (ii) through recourse to the courts for such patients in persistent vegetative state; and if he will estimate how many and what percentage of those patients in each year would (1) have issued an advance directive requesting such a recourse of action and (2) have such nutrition and hydration removed without their own express request. [96521]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the basis is for the distinction he makes between advance directives and advance refusals in respect of patients in persistent vegetative state or otherwise mentally incapacitated. [96522]

Mr. Hutton: Advance Statements are anticipatory decisions made while a person is capable, which are intended to give effect to that person's wishes as to how he or she shall be treated or cared for after the loss of capacity. An advance statement can be concerned with the refusal of medical treatment and are then sometimes known as advance directives.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation defining assisted food and fluid as treatment which may be withdrawn from patients with mental incapacities other than persistent vegetative state; and if he will make a statement. [96519]

Mr. Hutton: We have indicated that we intend to introduce a provision on Continuing Powers of Attorney (CPA) when parliamentary time allows such legislative changes.

It is a general principle of law and medical practice that all adults have the right to consent to or refuse medical treatment. The CPA is a method by which adults can continue to ensure that their views are respected in decisions concerning their welfare when they can no longer take, or communicate, those decisions themselves. A CPA therefore would allow an attorney to make decisions on behalf of the person without capacity about the withdrawal of artificial nutrition and hydration but only if the person has specifically given authority to do this in the CPA. Where decisions need to be taken in such cases, the healthcare team and attorney should do so in the best interests of the individual concerned.

Mentally Incapacitated Patients

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what definition he uses of the phrase, a patient's best interests, in relation to patients in persistent vegetative state and other mentally incapacitated patients. [96632]

Mr. Hutton: A patient's best interests includes his physical and psychological health, well being, quality of life, relationship with family and other carers, spiritual and religious welfare.

Mr. Tony Bland

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to enshrine in statute law the judgment in Airdale NHS Trust *v.* Bland [1993] in relation to the definition of assisted food and fluid as treatment and the removal of tubal feeding from Mr. Tony Bland. [96631]

Mr. Hutton: We have no plans to enshrine this judgment in statute law.

NHS (50th Anniversary)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost of commemorative *(a)* coins and *(b)* events to mark the 50th anniversary of the National Health Service. [96571]

Mr. Denham: Events to mark the 50th anniversary of the National Health Service were organised in accordance with the principles that activities should promote the core aims of the service and that money should not be diverted from patient care.

Commemorative coins marking the anniversary were produced by the Royal Mint and involved no cost on the part of the Department.

Central support for the NHS' special activities during its anniversary year were met within the Department's publicity and communications budget. The total for activity was £1,673,000, spread across the financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99. This was offset by sponsorship support to the value of around £1 million.

Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trusts

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the termination payment awarded to Clive Uren by Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trusts. [96333]

Ms Stuart: On 13 October 1999, Mr. Uren resigned as Chief Executive of Eastbourne Hospitals National Health Service Trust following the publication of the Review of Nursing at Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust.

The leaving arrangements for Mr. Uren, including his termination payment, were given independent approval by the District Auditor whose role is to ensure absolute propriety in such matters. The sum negotiated by the trust represented the lowest possible cost to the National Health Service within the terms of Mr. Uren's contract.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Refugees

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he is making to assist those refugees recognised by the United Kingdom as in need of international protection to settle successfully in this country; and if he will make a statement [97214]

Mrs. Roche: The Government recognise the immense contribution that refugees have made to our culture and society. We believe that once a decision is made to grant permission to stay, either permanently or on a long term basis, refugees need assistance to build their lives in the United Kingdom to develop their own and their families potential to the full and to contribute to their new host society. I have issued today a Consultation Paper which sets out our proposals to help achieve these aims through partnerships between central and local government, the voluntary sector, local communities, including ethnic minority and refugee community organisations and the refugee communities themselves. Views are invited from interested parties on how best to take forward this important work. The Consultation Paper is available in the Library and will also be sent to the main asylum and refugee interest groups and is available on the Home Office internet site: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/ind/assd/assd.htm.

Responses to the Consultation Paper should be forwarded to the Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Asylum Support Project Team, Quest House, 11 Cross Road, Croydon CR0 6ER by 6 December 1999.

Police Force Staff

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian staff were employed by police forces in England and Wales for each year since 1970. [96180]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is set out in the table.

Total police officer and civilian strength, England and Wales, 1970 to 1999

Year	Police Officers [1]	Civilians [2]
1970	92,446	26,061
1971	94,436	28,060
1972	97,943	29,316
1973	100,190	30,047
1974	100,727	32,971
1975	102,738	34,951
1976	107,832	34,551
1977	109,547	34,119
1978	108,170	35,044
1979	111,133	35,762
1980	114,543	37,695
1981	118,102	37,746
1982	119,973	37,891
1983	121,003	38,270
1984	121,053	38,898
1985	120,116	39,194
1986	120,848	40,268
1987	122,236	41,550
1988	124,080	42,350
1989	125,631	44,009
1990	126,777	44,525
1991	127,495	46,361
1992	127,627	47,336
1993	128,290	49,518
1994	127,897	50,229
1995	127,222	51,096
1996	126,901	52,933
1997	127,158	53,011
1998	126,814	52,975
1999	126,096	53,031

[1] Figures are as at 31 March.

[2] As at 31 December. Figures for 1990 and following years are as at 31 March.

Prison Sentences

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average length of time served in prison by persons who were convicted in each year since 1970 who have completed their sentences for *(a)* murder, *(b)* attempted murder, *(c)* rape and *(d)* grievous bodily harm. [96179]

Mr. Boateng: The available information given in the table relates to those persons discharged from Prison Service establishments in England and Wales since 1978 in respect of those convicted of murder, and since 1992 for other serious offences.

Average time served[1] by year of discharge for selected serious offences, 1978–1988

Year of discharge	Average time served (in years) Murder	Attempted murder	Grievous bodily harm	Rape
1978	9.1	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1979	9.2	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1980	10.6	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1981	9.8	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1982	10.6	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1983	10.5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1984	10.6	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1985	10.3	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1986	11.1	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1987	11.4	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1988	10.2	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1989	11.5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1990	12.2	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1991	11.9	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
1992	12.4	1.2	0.4	2.6
1993	14.4	3.3	0.6	3.2
1994	15.4	3.4	0.6	3.3
1995	14.0	3.5	0.6	3.7
1996	13.1	4.6	0.7	3.8
1997	14.4	3.7	0.7	3.9
1998	14.4	3.0	0.7	3.8

[1] Excluding any time spent on remand custody or following any subsequent recall
[2] Not available

Immigration

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in each of the last five years, how many applications for admission by overseas marriage partners of British men and women have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* refused. [96041]

Mrs. Roche: Entry clearance data to this degree of detail are collected only for posts in the Indian sub-continent, for applications made by the spouses of persons settled in the United Kingdom. This information is published in Table 2.3 of "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom 1998", a copy of which is in the Library.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are being used to refuse admissions to overseas brides and grooms of British men and women. [96032]

Mrs. Roche: An overseas national who wishes to join their spouse for settlement in the United Kingdom must obtain prior entry clearance from a British Diplomatic Post abroad. The United Kingdom-based sponsor may be either a British citizen or a person who is settled here in his or her own right.

An entry clearance as a spouse will not be issued unless the entry clearance officer is satisfied that:

(i) the applicant is married to a person present and settled in the United Kingdom or who is on the same occasion being admitted for settlement;

(ii) the parties to the marriage have met;

(iii) each of the parties intends to live permanently with the other as his or her spouse and the marriage is subsisting;

(iv) there will be adequate accommodation for the parties and any dependants without recourse to public funds in accommodation which they own or occupy exclusively; and

(v) the parties will be able to maintain themselves and any dependants adequately without recourse to public funds.

Where an entry clearance officer is not satisfied that each of these requirements is met, the entry clearance application will be refused.

A spouse may also be refused an entry clearance under the general provisions of the Immigration Rules (for example, on the grounds that he or she does not have a valid travel document, that they are the subject of a deportation order, that they have been convicted of an imprisonable offence, that it is undesirable to admit them for medical reasons, or that their exclusion from the United Kingdom is deemed to be conducive to the public good).

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of asylum applications processed from 30 June until 1 October have met the targets set down in the Asylum and Immigration Bill *(a)* of being processed with an initial decision within eight weeks and *(b)* of being completed within six months; and if he will make a statement. [96258]

Mrs. Roche: The available information is that 15 per cent. of the asylum decisions that were recorded in the period 1 July to 30 September 1999 were taken within eight weeks. The information relates to the length of time between the date an asylum application was lodged and the date of the initial decision.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support mechanisms in terms of *(a)* legal advice, *(b)* interpretation services and *(c)* other specialist support will be put in place to assist those asylum seekers held at the new reception facility at Oakington. [96197]

Mrs. Roche: Detailed arrangements have not yet been finalised. We will be discussing with all the relevant agencies, including refugee groups, what support mechanisms of this kind will be needed, bearing in mind that applicants will remain at the reception facility for short periods of about seven days.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* single, *(b)* shared and *(c)* family rooms will be available at the new asylum seeker reception facility at Oakington. [96196]

Mrs. Roche: The detailed design work is still to be finalised. Separate accommodation in physically separated buildings will be provided for males, for females, and for family groups. Some accommodation units for males will be shared accommodation.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with the local education authorities in Cambridgeshire to ensure that all children of asylum seekers held at the reception facility at Oakington will be offered full-time education. [96198]

Mrs. Roche: Applicants will reside at Oakington for short periods of about seven days. We will be discussing with all the relevant agencies what facilities need to be provided on site in those circumstances, but we do not envisage that full education facilities will be required.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average length of time that *(a)* single asylum seekers and *(b)* asylum seekers with child dependants who applied in each quarter of (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 have waited for the Home Office decision on their case; [96092]

(2) how long on average *(a)* single asylum seekers and *(b)* asylum seekers with child dependants whose applications were decided in (i) September, (ii) August, (iii) July, (iv) June, (v) May, (vi) April, (vii) March, (viii) February and (ix) January waited for the decision on their case from his Department. [96091]

Mrs. Roche: The available information in given in the tables. Separate figures for single persons and for asylum seekers with dependant children are not at present available.

Average decision times in months [1,3] : January-September 1999

Month of decision	*All applications*	*Applications lodged pre July 1993*	*Applications lodged post July 1993–95*	*Applications lodged post 1996*
January	44	95	52	5
February	42	93	53	5
March	42	92	49	8
April	31	88	49	12
May	27	87	50	13
June	37	86	53	14
July	48	84	55	10
August	49	85	55	10
September	49	88	56	10

Average decision times in months [2,3,4] for asylum applications lodged on a quarterly basis: 1997–1999

Quarter of application	*Average decision time*
1997	
January-March	8
April-June	7
July-September	7
October-December	7
1998	
January-March	6
April-June	6
July-September	5
October-December	5
1999	
January-March	4
April-June	2
July-September	1

[1] The average length of time (in months) relates to the month in which the application was made.
[2] The average length of time (in months) relates to the quarter in which the application was made.
[3] Excluding dependants.
[4] Does not include applications awaiting an initial decision.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of persons whose immigration and asylum appeals are pending and with whom the authorities have lost contact. [95944]

Mrs. Roche: We would only know that we had lost contact with an appellant if he or she failed to respond to official communications or failed to attend an appeal hearing. Figures are not collected centrally and it is therefore not possible to give any realistic estimate of the numbers involved.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to meet his target of processing asylum applications within six months. [96937]

Mrs. Roche: The White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—a modern approach to immigration and asylum" set out our proposals to deliver a more effective asylum system, including deciding asylum applications within an average of two months and determining asylum appeals within an average of four months. We are committed to meeting the White Paper target of achieving this by April 2001.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his provisional timetable for offering to competitive tender the administration of the asylum voucher scheme and for awarding a contract. [96935]

Mrs. Roche: Invitations to negotiate were issued on 22 October. The contract will be awarded via the European Community negotiated procedures route. It is expected that contracts will be awarded at the end of the year.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his planned timetable for the establishment of a Next Steps agency for asylum seeker support; and if he will make a statement. [96939]

Mrs. Roche: The support arrangements in Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Bill will be administered from within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office. It is not intended that this work will be overseen by a Next Steps agency in the first instance. However, the position will be kept under review.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on how he proposes to phase-in the transfer to the planned new arrangements for asylum support of people who will already be asylum seekers on 31 March 2000. [96938]

Mrs. Roche: When the new support arrangements take effect in April 2000, the first priority will be to deal with those claiming asylum and support after 1 April 2000. It is likely that those who are in receipt of social security benefits will remain on those benefits until they get a first negative decision. In the event that this is a refusal and the asylum seekers go on to appeal, they would need to transfer to the new support arrangements.

We are separately holding discussions with local authorities, through the Local Government Association, about appropriate arrangements for the transfer of asylum seekers who are being supported by local authority social services departments.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his provisional timetable for offering to competitive tender the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers and for awarding a contract. [96936]

Mrs. Roche: Invitations to tender were issued on 25 October. It is expected that contracts for the supply of accommodation will be awarded at the end of January. It is possible that further competitive tenders will be required. In addition, we are separately negotiating with local authorities about the accommodation that they can make available for supporting asylum seekers.

CCTV

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is *(a)* the largest town or city without a publicly funded CCTV system and *(b)* the smallest town or village with a publicly funded CCTV system; [96306]

(2) what circumstances agencies under his control match images derived from CCTV camera recordings against digitised *(a)* passport photographs, *(b)* driver licence photographs and *(c)* police photograph databases; and what controls he operates to prevent misuse of CCTV camera recordings; [96310]

(3) what recent evidence he has to establish the effect of CCTV on displacement of crime from CCTV surveillance areas to areas without CCTV; [96304]

(4) how much departmental money has been spent on CCTV for each of the last three years; and how much matched funding this has attracted in each of these years; [96308]

(5) if he will estimate the number of times per day a person in London will on average be caught on publicly funded CCTV; [96303]

(6) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of CCTV systems in *(a)* reducing crime levels and *(b)* increasing detection rates, with particular reference to the report funded by the Scottish Office into the effectiveness of CCTV in Glasgow; [96307]

(7) if he will estimate *(a)* the number of (i) police, (ii) other public sector and (iii) private operators of CCTV systems and *(b)* the number of active CCTV cameras in England; [96305]

(8) what powers he has to regulate the visibility of *(a)* public and *(b)* private CCTV systems. [96309]

Mr. Charles Clarke: £34 million of Home Office funding has been invested in Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) in England and Wales over the last three years under the CCTV Challenge competition of the previous Administration. This Government plan to invest a further £153 million over the next three years under the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative.

Almost 750 applications for England and Wales were received under the first round of the Initiative, and crime reduction partnerships have been invited to prepare final proposals on 376 bids for new and extended CCTV schemes, mainly directed at tackling vehicle crime and crime problems in housing areas, at a potential capital cost of £68 million. Partnerships and the private sector are contributing a further £15 million. The earlier CCTV Challenge competition attracted £51 million in funding from other sources.

Over 580 CCTV systems have been established with assistance from Home Office funds, involving the installation of 5,802 cameras. The shortlisted schemes in the first round of the current initiative provide for a further 3,879 cameras, including the upgrade and replacement of existing systems. Information on the number of police, public sector and private operators of CCTV systems currently in operation, and the number of cameras in use, is not held centrally.

We are concerned to ensure that CCTV is used effectively to achieve the maximum impact on crime and the fear of crime. Police operational experience and a number of research studies show that CCTV has considerable crime reduction and detection potential, particularly when used as part of a wider strategy. As with any crime reduction measure, there is a possibility of some displacement, but this is by no means inevitable. Schemes funded under the current initiative will be evaluated to build up the knowledge base of what works best in what context, as recommended in the Scottish Office report, "The Effect of CCTV on Recorded Crime Rates and Public Concern about Crime in Glasgow".

To retain public confidence, CCTV must be used fairly and lawfully. All schemes funded by the Home Office are required to comply with codes of practice governing their control and operation. The requirements include the need to ensure that cameras are visible to the public and that attention is drawn to them by appropriate signage; and that the recorded material is properly safeguarded and controlled. CCTV systems are also required to meet the requirements of data protection legislation, and the Data Protection Act 1998 provides for the first time a framework for the statutory regulation of schemes. Controllers will be required to notify details of their processing of personal data to the Data Protection Commissioner and comply with a set of enforceable principles of good data handling practice. Our aim is to bring the Act into force on 1 March 2000.

Proposals in our recent White Paper on the regulation of the private security industry, currently under consideration, would require operatives and employees involved in installing and monitoring CCTV systems, and managers and directors of companies, to be licensed.

Images derived from CCTV systems are not routinely matched against digitised images used on passports and driving licences. I understand that in one London Borough CCTV images are scanned against digitised police photographs in order to help trace the movement of known offenders.

No information is available on the largest town or city not to receive funding for CCTV or the smallest village to have been given an award. Nor is it possible to say how often someone in London would be within the view of publicly funded CCTV cameras, as this will depend entirely on individual circumstances.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many decisions caseworkers at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate dealing with *(a)* asylum and *(b)* immigration casework made on average per week in each quarter of 1998 and 1999 to the latest convenient date. [96026]

Mrs. Roche: The information is given in the table.

Average output per week [1] based on quarterly data [2]: 1998–99

	After-entry immigration casework [3]	*Asylum caseworker* [4]
1998		
First Quarter	3,670	710
Second Quarter	3,510	580
Third Quarter	3,930	620
Fourth Quarter	3,720	530
1999		
First Quarter	2,660	320
Second Quarter	3,760	920
Third Quarter	4,404	670

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10
[2] Assumed to be 13 weeks in each quarter
[3] Including some non-decision output (e.g. transfers of conditions, withdrawn applications) and right of abode decisions.
[4] Initial decisions made on applications received

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his current estimate of the gross expenditure, income and net expenditure of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate *(a)* to date during the current financial year and *(b)* for the whole financial year 1999–2000. [96940]

Mrs. Roche: The information about expenditure in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (excluding payments to asylum seekers) is as follows:

£

	Expenditure to 29 October 1999	*Estimated expenditure for 1999–2000*
Gross expenditure	132,964,000	284,385,000
Receipts	9,577,000	17,928,000
Net expenditure	123,387,000	266,457,000

Since 1 April 1999, the Home Office has been responsible for funding support costs to asylum seekers. From 1 April 1999 to 29 October 1999, £222 million has been paid to the Department of Social Security in respect of social security payments made by the Benefits Agency to asylum seekers. The estimate of expenditure for the whole of 1999–2000, including payments to the Department of Social Security and local authorities, is estimated to be in the range of £450 million—£490 million.

Tampere Conclusions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the (i) judicial and (ii) legal harmonisation called for in paragraph 33 of the Tampere Presidency Conclusions. [96509]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The European Council at Tampere concluded that the principle of mutual recognition, which the United Kingdom put forward, should become the cornerstone of judicial co-operation in both civil and criminal matters within the Union. The European Council conclusions in particular highlighted mutual recognition in relation to extradition, pre-trial orders and evidence, and asked the Council and the Commission to adopt, by December 2000, a programme to implement the principle of mutual recognition, including common minimum standards of procedural law which respect the fundamental legal principles of Member States.

United Kingdom proposals in this area were described in reply to a question from the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *12–13*, given by the former Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to paragraph 19 of the Tampere Presidency Conclusions, what national programmes he plans to establish to fight against discrimination. [96512]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are still awaiting publication by the European Commission of the package of proposals referred to in paragraph 19 of the Tampere Presidency Conclusions. Without sight of the package, it is difficult to say what national programmes we plan to establish pursuant to it.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has, however, committed this Government to bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity in order to extend the Race Relations Act 1976 to all public services, including the police. In addition, the Home Office Race Equality Unit expects to launch a new Race Equality Grant early next year. Both these developments could include any relevant proposals covered in the package.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the *(a)* role and *(b)* teaching matter, of the European Police College as agreed at Tampere. [96575]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *716*.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to paragraph 29 of the Tampere Presidency Conclusions, if he will make a statement on the planned information campaign, with special reference to the *(a)* cost, *(b)* target audience and *(c)* maintenance of political neutrality. [96508]

Mr. Lock: I have been asked to reply.

The campaign is intended to provide published information about judicial co-operation and legal procedures in the member states for the benefit of those, particular consumers and other small claimants, who may need to litigate from other member states. Making such information available is an important first st in improving access to justice across European borders. The Commission has not yet proposed how they intend to publish such information so it is not possible at this early stage to estimate the cost. Since this is factual information political neutrality should not be an issue.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to paragraphs 38–9 of the Tampere Presidency Conclusions, if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the *(a)* method, *(b)* nature and *(c)* extent of convergence in civil law. [96510]

Mr. Lock: I have been asked to reply.

The Government support, in principle, the elimination of obstacles to the good functioning of civil proceedings in cross border cases where this is necessary for the proper functioning of the internal market, including by promoting the compatibility of applicable civil procedure where there is a real and demonstrable need for such measures. However, the Government do not support blanket harmonisation of civil law and procedure, which would be unnecessary and impracticable, nor has any such proposal been made.

Jill Dando

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Jill Dando murder investigation has cost to date broken down into *(a)* salary and *(b)* other costs. [96270]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Metropolitan Police Commissioner tells me that, as of 26 October, the salary costs of the Central Crime Operational Unit investigative team were approximately £777,000; their other costs were approximately £477,000.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* full-time police officers, *(b)* part-time police officers and *(c)* civilian police staff are currently working on the Jill Dando murder investigation. [96268]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Metropolitan Police Commissioner tells me that, as of 26 October, the investigative team comprised 44 full-time police officers and seven full-time civilian staff; no part-time officers are on the team.

Correspondence

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde will receive a reply to his letter of 27 September concerning the Immigration and Asylum Bill. [96857]

Mr. Straw: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 28 October in response to his letter of 27 September concerning the Immigration and Asylum Bill. I am sorry that I was unable to do so sooner.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Torbay of 1 June regarding Mr. Abie Greyvenstein's application for British citizenship. [95764]

Mrs. Roche: I wrote to the hon. Member on 1 November 1999.

Entry Clearance (Spouse)

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been refused entry clearance to join spouses in the United Kingdom for settlement purposes on the grounds that the entry clearance officer was not satisfied that the couple intended to live together permanently and that the marriage was subsisting, for each of the years 1997, 1998 and 1999 and for *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* Bangladesh. [95946]

Mrs. Roche: The available information relates to decisions taken at the entry clearance issuing posts in India and Bangladesh in 1998 and the first half of 1999 and is given in the table. There is no comprehensive data for Pakistan.

Persons refused entry clearance to join spouses on the grounds that the entry clearance officer was not satisfied that the couple intended to live together permanently.

	India	*Bangladesh*
Refusals[1] solely for this reason		
1998	100	20
January-June 1999	70	10
Refusals[1] partly for this reason		
1998	210	70
January-June 1999	110	30

[1] After taking account of successful appeals

Police Complaints

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what subjects are covered in Home Office guidance to chief police officers; when the guidance on police complaints and discipline procedures was *(a)* last placed in the Library and *(b)* last revised; and if he will make each updated version available on the web. [96466]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Home Office guidance to chief officers covers a wide range of subjects. There is no single list of all the guidance which has been given, although the Home Office library does maintain a list of Home Office Circulars to chief officers. The list covers a good deal of the guidance which has been issued since 1969. The Home Office "Guidance to Chief Officers on Police Complaints and Discipline Procedures" was last amended in 1990 and placed in the Library in 1991. This guidance has now been largely replaced by the "Guidance on Police Unsatisfactory Performance, Complaints and Misconduct Procedures", which relates to the new procedures relating to police conduct introduced on 1 April 1999. This new guidance has also been placed in the Library. It is due to be revised shortly by the addition of a section dealing with senior officer conduct. The revised version will be placed in the Library, and published on the internet, along with any subsequent revisions.

Millennium (Emergency Procedures)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with voluntary organisations delivering emergency services about their ability to provide cover over the millennium period; and what encouragement he has given to such organisations to provide such cover. [96536]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There have been no direct discussions because the use of voluntary organisations in emergencies is a matter for local agencies. Local authorities are aware of the need to examine their arrangements over the millennium period.

Parking (Disabled People)

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were undertaken in 1998 against able-bodied motorists misusing spaces reserved for disabled people. [96429]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is not available.

Prosecutions for disabled parking space infringements cannot be separately identified in the statistics of other waiting and parking offences held centrally, nor is it likely that the police or the courts would be able to identify them separately.

Trespassers and Campers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent to which the police make use of their powers under *(a)* section 61 and *(b)* section 77 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994 in respect of trespassers and unauthorised campers. [96666]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The use of police powers under section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 is kept under review and meetings have been held between Ministers, officials and representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) about this issue. Revised operational guidance on the use of police powers was issued by ACPO in April this year. Powers under section 77 of the 1994 Act are exercised by local authorities.

Police Statistics

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in each police authority area in Wales in each of the past three years. [96552]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is set out in the table.

	31 March 1997	*31 March 1998*	*31 March 1999*
Dyfed Powys	1,005	1,002	1,026
Gwent	1,243	1,233	1,247
North Wales	1,369	1,396	1,391
South Wales	2,976	2,986	2,981

Cleveland Police

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *173*, on the Lancet inquiry, what is the name of the base from which the inquiry is being carried out; what is the breakdown of the costs of using these premises and if these costs were included in the costs given in his answer; and if he will make a statement. [96393]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Lancet inquiry is being run from rented premises acquired for the purpose. The cost of these premises is £2,623 per month. These costs were included in the costs of the inquiry given in a reply to my hon. Friend by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *173*. For operational reasons, it would not be appropriate to state the location of the premises.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 April 1999, *Official Report* 1999, column *484*, on Cleveland Police, what proportion of serving CID officers in Cleveland Police Force are under investigation in the Lancet inquiry in the boroughs of *(a)* Middlesbrough, *(b)* Stockton, *(c)* Langbaurgh and *(d)* Hartlepool; and if he will make a statement. [96394]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Operation Lancet is currently investigating 30 Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officers. Eight of these are suspended from duty. The remaining 22 officers are currently serving as follows:

(a) 11 at Middlesbrough out of a total strength of 39 CID officers;

(b) one at Stockton out of a total strength of 29 CID officers;

(c) seven at Langbaurgh out of a total strength of 17 CID officers;

(d) zero at Hartlepool; and

(e) three at Headquarters out of a total strength of 111 CID officers.

In a reply given to a question by my hon. Friend, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on 20 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *484*, he should have referred to six officers subject to investigation out of a total of 24 CID officers at Langbaurgh, rather than out of a total of 32 as stated. I am sorry that this mistake was not noticed earlier.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are working on the *(a)* Lancet and *(b)* Redwood inquiries into Cleveland Police; and if he will make a statement. [96272]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There are 17 officers from Cleveland and six officers from Northamptonshire currently working on Operation Lancet. For operational reasons, it would be inappropriate to comment on Operation Redwood.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *484*, if he will make a statement on the progress of the Redwood inquiry into the Cleveland Police Force. [96395]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Redwood inquiry is an on-going investigation and, for operational reasons, it would be inappropriate at this stage to make any further comment.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in Cleveland have been served with a regulation 7 disciplinary notice in connection with Operation Lancet. [96678]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Sixty officers in Cleveland Police have been served with a regulation 7 notice arising from Operation Lancet.

Police Services

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to deal with the impact of population sparsity on the provision of police services. [96593]

Mr. Straw: The needs of police forces with sparsely populated areas are already taken into account in the current police funding formula. The findings of a research study on policing areas of rural sparsity were considered by a Home Office chaired working group, which included representatives of police forces and police authorities. There was no single view within the working group on the conclusions of the research report. There was general agreement that a sparsity factor had been detected, but less agreement about how to include it appropriately in the police funding formula.

I understand the wishes of rural police forces to see the research findings implemented. Before doing so the Government will need to be satisfied that the research has provided a final answer to this question, which is beyond dispute or challenge.

For 2000–01, we propose to set considerable store by stability in the grant system to help police authorities plan ahead. In the July 1998 White Paper, "Modern Local Government—In Touch with the People", my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said we would not expect to make fresh changes to the method of calculation of Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs). This includes police SSAs, as a common formula is used for distribution of police grant and SSA.

Our present intention is that, subject to consultation and to approval by the House, we shall not make any changes to the method of police grant distribution, or revenue support grant distribution, generally for 2000–01. There will, therefore, be no substantive changes to the operation of the police funding formula for next year.

We shall need to make some limited adjustments to accommodate changes arising from the alterations to the boundary of the Metropolitan Police area and the Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey Police areas.

Wheel Clamping

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to regulate the operation of wheel clamping companies. [R] [96320]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In the White Paper "The Government's Proposals for Regulating the Private Security Industry in England and Wales", issued earlier this year, we announced proposals to regulate private wheel clampers as part of a package of statutory measures to regulate the private security industry as a whole. We will introduce legislation to Parliament as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

17. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the US Senate's rejection of the comprehensive test ban treaty. [95048]

22. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects for controls on the testing of nuclear weapons, following the rejection of the treaty by the United States Senate. [95054]

26. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the US Administration on the US Senate's failure to ratify the nuclear test ban treaty. [95060]

Mr. Hain: We have made clear our deep disappointment with the US Senate's vote against US ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. But we will continue to work with the US Administration, and with other key countries, to bring the Treaty into force as soon as possible.

Indonesia

18. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Indonesia concerning human rights. [95049]

Mr. Battle: I visited Indonesia from 6–9 September and raised human rights issues with the then President and Foreign Minister. We remain concerned about the overall human rights situation in Indonesia. But we are greatly encouraged by the inauguration of Indonesia's first ever democratically elected President on 20 October and the decision to drop Indonesia's claim on East Timor. We stand ready to offer support to President Wahid's new Government during Indonesia's transition to democracy and full respect for human rights.

Pakistan

19. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of the present Government of Pakistan. [95050]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), *Official Report*, column 81.

31. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of when Pakistan will be readmitted as a full member of the Commonwealth. [R] [95065]

Mr. Hain: The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, which met in London on 18 October, confirmed Pakistan's suspension from the councils of the Commonwealth. A Commonwealth Mission, led by the Foreign Minister of Canada, Lloyd Axworthy, visited Pakistan from 28–29 October in order to assess the situation there. It will report to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Durban, South Africa, on 12–15 November.

Departmental Recruitment

20. **Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts he is making to ensure that his Department attracts candidates for employment from all sections of British society. [95051]

Mr. Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones), *Official Report*, column 89.

Pakistani-Indian Relations

21. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on Pakistani-Indian bilateral relations. [95053]

Mr. Robin Cook: It is essential for regional stability that India and Pakistan enjoy good relations. We continue to encourage dialogue between them to resolve their outstanding differences, including Kashmir.

Kosovo

23. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if when he last met his colleagues from other member-states of the European Union they discussed matters relating to the policing of communities in Kosovo. [95056]

Mr. Vaz: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the security situation in Kosovo with his EU counterparts at the General Affairs Council meeting on 11 October. Partners welcomed a proposal by my right hon. Friend for an EU initiative to tackle the threat of organised crime in Kosovo, and commissioned further work to take this forward. The council also condemned the continuation of ethically based violence in Kosovo and called on leaders of various ethnic groups to put an end to it.

28. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the reconstruction programme required in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [95062]

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the reconstruction programme in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [95035]

Mr. Vaz: Assessments on the needs for reconstruction assistance have been carried out by the World Bank and the European Commission who are leading the international effort on the reconstruction of Kosovo. These will be presented to a donors conference on 17 November. We fully support the efforts of the UN, the EU and the Stability Pact for South-East Europe in their reconstruction efforts.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the security situation in the Kosovo towns of *(a)* Mitrovica and *(b)* Orahovac. [96945]

Mr. Vaz: There are continuing stand-offs between Albanians and Serbs at Mitrovica over freedom of movement and access to homes, Mitrovica University and the local hospital. The Kosovo Force (KFOR) and UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) are working with both communities to encourage the process of reconciliation and to allow freedom of movement within the city. In Orahovac, there is a continuing stand-off with the local Albanian inhabitants over the deployment of a Russian KFOR contingent. We support KFOR and UNMIK efforts to resolve the problem.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent to which the borders between *(a)* Kosovo and Albania and *(b)* Kosovo and Macedonia are adequately secured; and who controls them. [97063]

Mr. Vaz: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, which established the international presences in Kosovo, gives the NATO-led international military presence in Kosovo, KFOR, responsibility for conducting border monitoring duties as required. Assuring the security of Kosovo's border with Albania and Macedonia is also a task for the United Nations interim administration in Kosovo (UNMIK), which has general responsibility for maintaining civil law and order.

Both KFOR and UNMIK recognise the importance of ensuring adequate control of Kosovo's borders. KFOR will continue to give border monitoring a high priority while the UN mission builds up the international police force in Kosovo, part of whose functions include border duties. UNMIK has also set up a customs service operating at border crossings. Negotiations are under way with the Macedonian Government to improve the efficiency of the major crossing point on the Kosovo/Macedonia border.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the number of Kosovo Albanians killed by the Yugoslav Army, Serbian security forces and paramilitaries in Kosovo during the Operation Allied Force. [96949]

Mr. Vaz: Our current estimate remains that at least 10,000 civilians were killed in Kosovo as a result of war crimes by the Serbs between June 1998 and June 1999. We do not have disaggregated figures for those killed during Operation Allied Force.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the planned 3,000 police officers for Kosovo have been deployed since 10 June. [96947]

Mr. Vaz: Currently around 1,750 international police officers from 25 countries are deployed to Kosovo. The full contingent of officers originally required should be in place by the end of November. Following his report of 16 September, the United Nations Secretary-General has approved proposals for the deployment of 1,600 extra officers. The United Nations is expected to issue a request to donor nations for further officers soon.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the ethnic composition is of the Kosovo Transitional Council; how many times the Council has met since 10 June; and if it is still operational. [97066]

Mr. Vaz: The Kosovo Transitional Council (KTC) was established by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative in Kosovo as an inclusive, consultative body bringing together all major political parties and ethnic groups in Kosovo. Its members include two each from the three major Kosovo Albanian political groupings, two Kosovo Albanian independents, two Kosovo Serbs and two members representing Kosovo's other ethnic minorities.

The Council has met sporadically since its inaugural meeting on 16 July. We are aware of six further meetings. Attendance has varied, depending on reactions by the various groupings to the situation on the ground or political developments at the time.

The Transitional Council is still operational, and has an important role to play in allowing representatives of different ethnic groups to have their say in the running of Kosovo and in preparing the transition from UN administration to local self-government.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government have provided to the international effort to identify and investigate mass graves in Kosovo. [97064]

Mr. Hain: A UK Scenes of Crime Team consisting of police and forensic personnel carried out investigations in Kosovo on behalf of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia from 18 June to 24 October. The Team was responsible for exhuming bodies, establishing the cause of death and collecting other evidence at the sites of some of the worst atrocities.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether the Kosovo Liberation Army's demilitarisation has been conducted in accordance with the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and a consequent Demilitarisation Agreement. [97083]

Mr. Vaz: UN Security Council Resolution 1244 gave the NATO-led international military force in Kosovo (KFOR) responsibility for demilitarising the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). On 20 September, KFOR reported that the KLA had complied with the undertaking to demilitarise which it had given to NATO on 21 June.

The then commander of KFOR, General Sir Mike Jackson, said on 13 October that over 10,000 weapons and 5 million rounds of ammunition had been handed in by the KLA. Any weapons now found on ex-KLA members are unlawfully held and are subject to seizure and destruction.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which international organisation has the mandate to function as the primary investigative and prosecutional agency for criminal acts committed on the territory of Kosovo between March 1998 and 10 June 1999. [96948]

Mr. Vaz: UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which established the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the NATO-led Kosovo force (KFOR), gives UNMIK responsibility for maintaining civil law and order in Kosovo. This includes investigations and prosecutions for alleged criminal acts committed on the territory of Kosovo before the deployment of UNMIK and KFOR in June 1999. In the case of possible war crimes, decisions would be made in consultation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the Kosovo Serbs' proposal regarding establishment of *(a)* Serb enclaves within Kosovo and *(b)* Serb defence forces. [97065]

Mr. Vaz: We support, and are contributing to, the efforts of the international presences in Kosovo, the UN Mission (UNMIK) and the NATO-led international force (KFOR). UNMIK and KFOR are committed to promoting a secure environment in Kosovo for all ethnic groups. They are making special efforts to protect members of minority groups judged to be at risk, including Kosovo Serbs.

We want Kosovo Serbs to participate in institutions established by the international presences in Kosovo, such as the police, the Kosovo Protection Corps and the civil administration. We would not support proposals for separate enclaves or protection forces.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest position in Kosovo. [95052]

Mr. Vaz: The security situation has stabilised, due to the work of the NATO-led international force in Kosovo—KFOR, and the United Nations international police presence. Ethnic violence is still a problem, but KFOR and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) are putting as many resources as possible into tackling this issue. The number of Serbs and other ethnic minorities leaving the province has fallen. Some are returning.

Efforts are underway to control the borders more effectively for the purposes of security and revenue collection. A new customs service has been established and police are now posted at border crossings. Life is slowly getting back to normal with rubbish collections; post offices, businesses, factories, schools and universities opening; rail services being restored and a police emergency service line. Water and power supplies are being rehabilitated—two out of the four electricity generating stations are now operational and health care facilities are vastly improved. To prepare for winter over 78,500 house rehabilitation or prefabrication kits are being distributed which will help almost half a million people. Over a million square metres have been cleared of land mines and unexploded ordnance.

Work is also underway on restoring human rights and self governance to the province. This includes assistance to the media, political parties, judiciary, and prisons. Plans for voter registration and preparations for local elections are also being made. The work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is well underway. We continue to strongly support their work.

There is still much to be done, but the international community and its agencies are committed to the goal of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous Kosovo.

China

24. **Mrs. Brinton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote democracy and human rights in China. [95058]

Mr. Battle: We have regular dialogue with the Chinese authorities on human rights including the situation in Tibet and raise the issue at every appropriate opportunity. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed human rights with the Chinese President Jiang Zemin during his recent State Visit. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did the same during his talks with the Chinese Foreign Minister on 20 October, in which he handed over further names of individuals about whom we are

concerned. The most recent round of the official-level bilateral human rights dialogue was held in London in September.

Spain and Gibraltar

25. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the European Commission concerning the obstruction of movement between Spain and Gibraltar. [R] [95059]

Mr. Vaz: We have raised the continuing problems at the border between Gibraltar and Spain with the European Commission on several occasions in recent months. Following the inauguration of the new Commission this Autumn, both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Home Affairs and my predecessor as Minister for Europe have discussed the issue with EU Commissioner Vitorino. We will continue to press the Commission to take effective action in this matter.

Commonwealth Membership

27. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth to discuss the criteria for Commonwealth membership. [95061]

Mr. Hain: I have no plans to discuss the criteria for Commonwealth membership with the Commonwealth Secretary-General. They were agreed by Heads of Government at the 1997 CHOGM in Edinburgh. Decisions on membership are taken by the whole Commonwealth on the basis of consensus, against the background of these agreed criteria.

East Timor

29. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's current assessment of the situation in East Timor. [95063]

Mr. Battle: We welcome the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1272 on 25 October. We shall continue to support the UN efforts to create the independent East Timor for which the East Timorese people so overwhelmingly voted on 30 August.

Nigeria

30. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in the development of consular relationships with Nigeria since its readmission to the Commonwealth. [95064]

Mr. Hain: Since Nigeria's readmission to the Commonwealth we have rebuilt a friendly and constructive relationship with the new government, covering all aspects of mutual interest. Britain fully supports President Obasanjo's reform programme.

Tampere Conference

32. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet senior members of the judiciary, the legal professions and the police to discuss the consequences of the Tampere conference of 15 and 16 October. [95066]

Mr. Vaz: I have no current plans to do so. My right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor will, however, be taking forward work on justice and home affairs issues raised at Tampere.

Mission Statement

33. **Mr. Trend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the ethical dimension to his foreign policy as outlined in his Department's mission statement. [95068]

Mr. Hain: We have placed human rights at the heart of Foreign Policy. We believe in the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the core United Nations human rights instruments. We are committed to protecting and promoting these rights, working through our bilateral relationships and with our European Union and other International partners. In implementing this policy we take account of the individual characteristics of each situation, and seek to use the combination of approaches—of dialogue and pressure—that is most likely to secure real human rights improvements on the ground.

European Enlargement

34. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the German Chancellor to discuss European enlargement; and if he will make a statement. [95069]

Mr. Vaz: European Union enlargement is a major priority of the Government. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will discuss enlargement with the German Foreign Minister when they meet at the General Affairs council on 15–16 November. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the German Chancellor discussed enlargement at the European council in Tampere on 15 October and will return to the subject at the Helsinki European council on 9 December.

Economic and Social Affairs Council

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next nominate persons to serve on the EU Economic and Social Affairs Council. [94574]

Mr. Vaz: We will nominate 24 permanent and 24 reserve members to serve on the next Economic and Social Committee in 2002, when the current committee's mandate expires.

EC Handbook

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government have compiled for use by Government Departments a handbook on the procedures and functions of *(a)* the European Communities and *(b)* European Communities working groups, with particular reference to UK Civil Service input. [95544]

Mr. Vaz: We prepared guidance handbooks on the institutions of the European Union and on the procedures in the Council for the use of civil servants and Ministers during the UK's Presidency of the Council in 1998. Guidance on procedures for handling EU business is updated from time to time.

Western Sahara

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Morocco concerning the conduct and timing of the referendum on the future of Western Sahara. [96838]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* We raise the situation in the Western Sahara regularly in our bilateral dealings with the Moroccan Government. The Secretary of State met his Moroccan counterpart in April and I expect to make contact with them soon.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the UN Secretary-General concerning the conduct and timing of the referendum on the future of Western Sahara. [96839]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* We are in regular contact with the UN Secretary-General on the Western Sahara through our Mission in New York and through our Ambassador in Rabat. We fully support both the content of the UN referendum process and the Secretary-General's planned timetable.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's contribution to the UN's work in Western Sahara. [96840]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* From September 1991 until September 1993, the UK contributed 15 military observers including the Chief of Staff to MINURSO, the United Nations' Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara.

Since the establishment of the mission, the UK has been liable for its share of UN assessed contributions. In the last financial year, the UK paid £2,359,371 in assessed contributions to MINURSO.

We continue to support UN efforts to bring about a lasting peace to the Western Sahara and believe that a free and fair referendum represents the best way forward unless the parties can agree an alternative political solution.

Bilateral Treaties

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the bilateral treaties between the UK and the US *(a)* are still in effect and *(b)* were ratified in the last 30 years. [96301]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 20 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *501*. That answer refers to the number of US-UK bilateral treaties which, having entered into force, were sent to the Public Record Office for permanent preservation. However, some of these bilateral treaties may no longer be in effect, having been overtaken by new treaties. Officials are now conducting a search to establish precisely how many treaties are still in effect, and which of those treaties were ratified in the last 30 years. I will inform the hon. Member as soon as I have the necessary information.

Arms Exports

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people are employed in his Department in examining arms export licence applications. [97061]

Mr. Hain: Lead responsibility for formulating the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's advice to the Department of Trade and Industry on individual export licence applications generally rests with the relevant geographical departments, in consultation with the Non-Proliferation Department and other functional departments as appropriate, in particular the Human Rights Policy Department and the United Nations Department. In some cases geographical departments may also consult overseas posts, for example to seek more information on proposed end-uses or end-users.

Against this background, it is not possible to give a precise figure for the number of officials involved. But a significant proportion of officials in geographical departments and in the relevant sections of the above-named functional departments have some degree of involvement in examining export licence applications. Nearly all such officials have other responsibilities which they fulfil alongside their role in export licence processing.

Iraq (Sanctions)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to the report of the Bishop of Coventry and his ecclesiastical colleagues on their recent visit to Baghdad and their assessment of the policy of UN sanctions against Iraq. [95458]

Mr. Hain: Officials from the Foreign Office have a regular dialogue about Iraq with the Church of England through the Board for Social Responsibility's International and Development Affairs Committee. This has included discussion of the recent visit to Iraq by the Bishop of Coventry and his colleagues. We are aware of the Bishops' views on the sanctions regime on Iraq and have briefed them on the Government's position. We share the Bishops' concern for the humanitarian situation in Iraq and have undertaken to keep them informed of our continuing efforts to improve it.

OSCE Progress Report

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the South Eastern Europe Regional Table periodic report to the OSCE has been produced; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [96946]

Mr. Vaz: The Stability Pact document tasks the Special Coordinator to provide, on behalf of the Stability Pact Regional Table, periodic progress reports to the OSCE. The OSCE Summit to be held in Istanbul on 18–19 November is the next opportunity for a progress report. When the report becomes available a copy will be placed in the Library.

Montenegro

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what security undertaking has been made by NATO to Montenegro since the end of operation Allied Force. [96944]

Mr. Vaz: No security undertakings have been made by NATO to Montenegro.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Oral Statements

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the reports published by his Department and its associated bodies, *(b)* the reports received from bodies set up by his Department, *(c)* the decisions his Department has taken and *(d)* events in the UK and elsewhere, since 27 July, which satisfied the criteria he uses for deciding whether to apply to make oral statements to the House when the House is sitting. [93982]

Mr. Ingram: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by the President of the Council on 19 October 1999, *Official Report*, Column *429*.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the Government's policy on pre-school education in Northern Ireland [93492]

Mr. McFall *[holding answer 20 October 1999]:* This Government are committed to the development of pre-school education in Northern Ireland and are taking forward a four year expansion programme, through partnership between the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, to provide over 9,000 additional pre-school places. By 2001–02, £38 million will have been spent in almost doubling pre-school education provision in Northern Ireland.

Departmental Twinning

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many requests there have been to his Department for placement of officials from Central, East European and CIS states as twins of his officials; how many such officials have been accepted as twins; and from which countries *(a)* those who were accepted and *(b)* those who were not accepted came. [94004]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns, *739–40*.

Human Rights Commission

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what moneys were allocated by his Department to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for each of its first three years; and what requests for greater funding were received by his Department. [95502]

Mr. George Howarth: The Commission is defined as a Non Departmental Public Body and is funded by means of a grant in aid. Its grant in aid for each of its first three years will be £750,000. The Government are determined to ensure that the Commission is properly funded to carry out its various duties and functions, and believe that the current level of funding is adequate. The Commission informed the Secretary of State of its intention to seek additional funding in a letter dated 22 October. Any formal request for an increase in funding will be considered alongside the other financial demands that the Northern Ireland Office has to meet in its annual budget.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what basis post-graduate interns have been selected to work for the Human Rights Commission; and how many of them are of *(a)* British, *(b)* Irish and *(c)* other nationality. [95504]

Mr. George Howarth: Two post-graduate interns have worked at the Commission for a three month period this year. The basis of their selection and questions relating to their nationality are the responsibility of the Commission, and I have asked the Chief Commissioner to write to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the decision of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to intervene in the matter of UK-wide legislation which is without a specific Northern Ireland aspect. [95508]

Mr. George Howarth: I am not certain to which specific intervention the right hon. Gentleman refers; however, section 69(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states that:

> "The Commission shall keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights".

This duty is not confined to instances where there is a specific Northern Ireland aspect to UK-wide legislation.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which political parties were invited to consult over the proposals that appear in the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's draft strategic plan; which were consulted; and which declined or failed to respond. [95496]

Mr. George Howarth: The Commission is an independent body and as such its proposals and activities are a matter for the Commission itself. I have therefore asked the Chief Commissioner to write to the right hon. Gentleman to inform him of the consultation process on the Commission's draft strategic plan.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what interests have been registered by the members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. [95506]

Mr. George Howarth: The Commission maintains a Register of Interests for both Commissioners and staff. It can be seen by any member of the public at the Commission's office in Belfast.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when his Department made a formal request to the Northern Ireland Human Rights

Commission asking it to consult and advise on the possibility of a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights; and in what terms was this request. [95505]

Mr. George Howarth: My right hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Marjorie Mowlam), the then Secretary of State, wrote to the Chief Commissioner on 24 March 1999, as she was required to do under Section 69(7) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. She invited the Commission to provide advice of the kind referred to in paragraph 4 of the relevant section of the Belfast Agreement, namely:

> "to consult and to advise on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, drawing as appropriate on international instruments and experience. These additional rights to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem, and—taken together with the ECHR—to constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland."

The Act does not set a time limit for receipt of these proposals and the Secretary of State did not ask for the Commission's proposals within a set time.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Committee on the Administration of Justice made application to the Council of Europe for funding for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission before the Commission's members were appointed; and if he will make a statement. [95497]

Mr. George Howarth: The Commission, although funded by Government, is free to seek additional funding from outside sources. Other bodies are also free to seek funding on its behalf. This is not a matter for the Government.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff work for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; and on what grades and salaries. [95503]

Mr. George Howarth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to approve the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's employment of staff as to numbers and as to remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment.

The Commission has to date appointed eight members of staff. The staff are not civil servants and the Commission has not adopted formal grades, however they have used the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NIC) Pay Scales as a guide to salaries.

There are three Administrative Officers employed on the equivalent of the Clerical and Secretarial Pay Scale. There are four staff appointed on the equivalent of Scale 119; these are a Research Worker; Case Worker; Education Worker and Development Worker. The Commission's Chief Executive is appointed on the equivalent of the Principal Officer Scale of the NICS.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on which occasions meetings of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission have been held outside its own headquarters; if any such meetings have been in the private offices of Commissioners; and if he will make a statement about this practice. [95579]

Mr. George Howarth: The Northern Ireland Act 1998 leaves the Commission free to determine its own procedures. I have asked the Chief Commissioner to write to the right hon. Gentleman on the point that he raises.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the report drawn up by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on whether paramilitary violations of human rights are appropriate for campaigning action by the Commission; and if he will make a statement. [95507]

Mr. George Howarth: It is not for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to decide to publish any material that the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission produces. Section 69(9) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states that:

> "The Commission may decide to publish its advice and the outcome of its research and investigations".

I have asked the Chief Commissioner, Professor Brice Dickson, to write to the right hon. Gentleman on the issue that he raises.

Portadown Attack

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance was provided by *(a)* the Specialist Fingerprint Unit and *(b)* the Biology Section of the Northern Ireland Forensic Service to the Royal Ulster Constabulary investigation into the murder of Robert Hamill. [95363]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The RUC have advised that no items seized by the police were suitable for examination by the Specialist Fingerprint Unit. Items of hair, blood and fibres were sent to the Biology Section for examination.

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* deaths, *(b)* shootings and *(c)* bombings have been attributed to (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican paramilitary groups (A) since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and (B) during 1999. [95715]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The table shows the deaths, shootings and bombings attributed to Loyalist and Republican groups:

	10 April 1998–21 October 1999		*1 January 1999–21 October 1999*	
	Loyalist	*Republican*	*Loyalist*	*Republican*
Deaths	11	36	3	4
Shooting incidents	127	76	53	42
Bombing incidents	136	22	65	Nil

Human Rights Act

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those organisations and institutions identified as public bodies under the Human Rights Act 1998; if he will describe departmental preparations for implementation of the Act and if the Department has *(a)* created a timetable and action plan,

(b) set up structural arrangements and performance management to oversee the preparation process, *(c)* undertaken a study of compatibility in primary legislation, *(d)* drawn up a risk management strategy, *(e)* developed a communication strategy to prepare subsidiary public authorities for changed responsibilities and *(f)* established steering groups on training that will identify and meet needs of particular sectors. [95369]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* There can be no definitive list of organisations and institutions which are public authorities under the Human Rights Act. It will be for the courts to decide in individual cases whether an organisation is a public authority for the purposes of the Act.

The Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments are taking forward work in preparation for the implementation of the Act in October 2000. Public authorities for which the Northern Ireland Office is responsible have been alerted to the requirements of the Act. An inter-departmental working group (comprising the Northern Ireland Office, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Director for Public Prosecutions Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Court Service, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and the Army) has been meeting regularly to monitor progress being made by individual bodies in preparing for the Act and to identify any issues on which a joint approach would be most effective.

In June a major human rights seminar was held by the Northern Ireland Office. It involved the main criminal justice organisations and players in Northern Ireland, including non-statutory bodies. Its aim was to generate a heightened awareness of issues surrounding the Human Rights Act, contribute to a common understanding of the issues and provide an opportunity to discuss new concerns and to discern where a common approach is required.

The training of staff on the requirements of the Act has begun, and managers are continuing to assess their staff training requirements to determine what further training will be required.

Guidance on the Human Rights Act has been issued to all Northern Ireland Departments. Northern Ireland Departments are continuing to refine their Action Plans which outline the work which will be carried out in preparation for the implementation of the Act. Scrutiny exercises are under way in each Department to examine legislation and procedures to ensure that they are compatible with the Act. Northern Ireland Departments are also in close contact with their counterparts in Great Britain to ascertain what their scrutiny of similar legislation has revealed.

Departments have been in contact with the public bodies which they sponsor and are taking steps to ensure that these public bodies are aware of their duties under the Act.

Training for the staff of Northern Ireland Departments has been undertaken and is continuing. Training needs are being kept under review.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those non-governmental organisations that have been consulted on preparations for implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998 and outline his plans to involve NGOs in the future. [95370]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* The Northern Ireland Office receives advice on preparation for implementation of the Human Rights Act from the Human Rights Task Force.

The Human Rights Task Force was created by the Home Secretary and exists to bring together Government and human rights organisations in order to help public authorities prepare for the Human Rights Act. The Task Force maintains a dialogue between the Government and non-governmental organisations on the readiness of public authorities and the legal profession for implementation.

Professor Brice Dickson, Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, attends Task Force meetings. We are discussing with the Commission the provision of training on the implementation of the Human Rights Act.

The Northern Ireland Office has engaged the services of Queens University Belfast (QUB) to deliver half-day awareness sessions to members of the Senior Civil Service. The Northern Ireland Civil Service Departmental Solicitors' Group are also working with QUB to provide more in-depth seminars to legal staff across the Northern Ireland Court Service. This includes legal staff in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland and the Crown Solicitor's Office.

There are no plans to involve other non-governmental organisations directly in the preparations for implementation in Northern Ireland of the Human Rights Act, but the Government will continue to follow the advice provided by the Human Rights Task Force.

Prisoner Releases

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners released under the accelerated prisoner release scheme in Northern Ireland have re-offended; what was the nature of those offences; if any have broken the terms of their licences; and if he will make a statement. [96607]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Of the 299 prisoners who have been released to date under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, six have been prosecuted for offences committed since the date of their release. The nature of the charges against three are of Assault on police officers and breach of the peace; Theft; Grievous bodily harm with intent; Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily harm; and Affray. A fourth was charged with handling stolen goods, the fifth with armed robbery and the sixth with possession with intent to supply controlled drugs. None of the six were charged with terrorist related offences and were not deemed to have broken their licence conditions.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners released under the accelerated prisoner release scheme are awaiting trials for offences committed since the date of their release. [96606]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Of the 299 prisoners who have been released to date under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 five are currently awaiting trials for offences committed since the date of their release. None of the five have been charged with terrorist related offences.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set out the terms of the licence conditions of prisoners released under the accelerated release scheme in Northern Ireland who have subsequently re-offended. [96612]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Of the six persons prosecuted for offences committed since the date of their release, five were determinate sentence prisoners and as such the terms of their release on licence under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 were conditional upon the following:

that they do not support a specified organisation (within the meaning of section 3 of the Act);

that they do not become concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland.

The remaining one was previously a life sentence prisoner and as such their release on licence under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 was conditional upon the following:

that they do not support a specified organisation (within the meaning of section 3 of the Act);

that they do not become concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland; and

that they do not become a danger to the public.

None of the six were prosecuted for offences which were terrorist related and were not deemed to have broken their licence conditions.

RUC Training

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what training Royal Ulster Constabulary uniformed personnel receive in administering first aid to injured persons. [94429]

Mr. Ingram: New recruits attend a three day First Aid course equivalent to those run by the St. John's Ambulance and Red Cross. Officers are expected to maintain a tri-annual revalidation by attending a one day Emergency Aid course. Specialist units e.g. Traffic Branch and Community Affairs attend two day scenario-based courses specific to their needs. In addition, police and civilian support staff may volunteer for a four day 'First Aid at Work' course made available under Health and Safety legislation.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Emotional Development (Children)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from *(a)* the National Association for Therapeutic Education and *(b)* others about the needs of emotionally undeveloped children. [95219]

Jacqui Smith: Ministers and officials in my Department have in recent years considered a range of representations from the National Association for Therapeutic Education (NATE). NATE were invited by the National Advisory Group on Special Educational Needs to contribute evidence during the consultation which informed our Green Paper "Excellence For All Children: Meeting Educational Needs".

My officials have an extensive network of contacts and keep in close touch with a range of bodies concerned with addressing children's emotional under-development.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many requests he has received from local education authorities to *(a)* dispose of and *(b)* change the use of, school playing fields since 1 May 1997; and if he will list those playing field sites for which approval has been granted for (i) disposal and (ii) change of use. [95743]

Jacqui Smith: Until the implementation on 1 October 1998 of Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, local authorities in England did not need the consent of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to dispose, or change the use, of school playing fields.

Since 1 October 1998 there have been 147 applications from local authorities to dispose of part or, at some closed schools, the whole of a school's playing field. There have been no applications by local education authorities to change the use of playing fields that have not involved a disposal. All applications are assessed against criteria which have been published by the Department in its circular: "The Protection of School Playing Fields".

Approval has been granted in 86 cases. Of those, 33 were at closed or closing schools and a further 23 led to improved sports facilities. The remainder were for improvements to educational facilities and were approved only when it was clear that they did not affect the access of pupils to suitable playing fields.

European Social Fund

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will take steps to transfer from next year the *(a)* responsibility and *(b)* budget for European Social Fund activities in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales. [95750]

Ms Jowell: Discussions are currently taking place between my officials and those of the National Assembly for Wales about the future arrangements for ESF activities in Wales.

New Deal

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the publications issued since 1 May 1997 relating to the New Deal, the total cost per publication and the numbers of each publication which have been produced. [96302]

Ms Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the then Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities on 3 March 1999, *Official*

Report, column *814*. The following table of New Deal publications shows the total cost and number of publications produced since then. The amounts shown include the cost for any updating and reprinting as necessary, and the production of ethnic minority language and Welsh bilingual versions.

Title	*Copies*	*Cost (£)*
Publications for employers including:		
New Deal for Employers	105,000	15,189
Taking Care of the Future (produced in partnership with Daycare Trust)	21,500	7,922
Making the Most of New Deal (produced in partnership with Daycare Trust)	7,500	5,408
Publications for young unemployed aged 18–24		
New Deal for Young People aged 18–24	119,500	8,728
New Deal for Musicians	43,000	13,482
Publications for unemployed people aged 25plus		
A New Start (New Deal for 25plus)	110,000	9,201
Extra Help (New Deal 25plus pilot folder with insert sheet)	100,000	651
Publications that are for other, or multiple, target audiences		
What is New Deal?	75,000	8,361
Factsheets	6,000	1,086
New Deal Award Entry Forms	33,000	5,123
New Deal Conference Report	10,000	11,566

Note:
The quantities and costs shown are totals including all versions of the publication.

SCOTLAND

Government Expenditure and Revenue

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in which section of Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 1996–97 provision is made for receipts from the Crown Estate Commissioners. [95272]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The Crown Estate Commissioners pay a dividend to the Consolidated Fund, which is included in UK general government interest and dividends in the public finances. The Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1996–97 report allocated a share of UK general government interest and dividends to Scottish receipts on the basis of Scotland's share of Gross Domestic Product (excluding the Continental Shelf).

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the categories contained in the paper, Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 1996–97, which include appropriations in aid for the Scottish Office and other departments. [95269]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* All the categories contained in Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1996–97 include appropriations in aid. Details of the appropriations in aid which were applied by the Scottish Office for 1996–97 were published in the Appropriation Accounts for that year by The Stationery Office on 13 February 1998 (HC251-XIII).

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state his Department's role in the preparation and publication of the next paper on Government Revenue and Expenditure Scotland; and when the next such paper will be published. [95273]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The next report on Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland, in common with previous reports, is being prepared by members of the Government Economic Service and Government Statistical Service. No firm date has been set for publication but it is expected to be before the end of this year. My Department will assess the report's contents and implications.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list and state the amounts for each of the miscellaneous receipts referred to in the Other Receipts section of Appendix B of Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 1996–97. [95270]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The research underlying the report on Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1996–97 apportioned aggregate UK other receipts on the basis of Scotland's share of UK gross domestic products (excluding Continental Shelf). The analysis does not identify all the individual components of the other receipts category and allocate a share of them to Scotland on an individual and separate basis.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Assets

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Solicitor-General if he will list the assets sold by the Attorney-General's Department and its agencies and their value in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99; and if he will estimate the value of asset sales planned to be made in the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [96405]

The Solicitor-General: Details for the Law Officers' Departments are as follows. The Serious Fraud Office disposed of no assets of material value in the years from 1991–92 to 1998–99 and currently do not estimate any material sales for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers' disposed of no assets of material value in the years from 1991–92 to 1998–99 and

currently do not estimate any material sales for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The Crown Prosecution Service has sold three assets during the period 1991–92 to 1998–99, and has no plans to sell any assets in the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The asset sales, together with their value, are listed in the following table:

Year	Asset	Value (£)
1998–99	None	0
1997–98	3 buildings	415,070
1996–97	None	0
1995–96	None	0
1994–95	None	0
1993–94	None	0
1992–93	None	0
1991–92	None	0

The Treasury Solicitor's Department, including the Government Property Lawyers' Agency, has made the following asset sales:

Year	Asset	Value (£)
1998–99	Surplus IT equipment	2,505
	Furniture/Office equipment	549
1997–98	Surplus IT equipment	4,100
	Surplus library books	750

Disposals of the same type, but probably of a lower magnitude, are expected to continue in 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

In 1999–2000, sales of office furniture and office equipment to the value of £20,000 have taken place following the closure of the Government Property Lawyers' Agency. No further sales resulting from this closure are planned. No major sales of assets took place prior to 1997–98. Details of minor and routine sales over the period 1991–92 to 1997–97 are not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

Performance Targets

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Solicitor-General what key performance targets he has set for the Treasury Solicitor's Department in 1999–2000. [97205]

The Solicitor-General: In 1999–2000 the performance of the Treasury Solicitor's Department will be measured against the following targets:

Performance	Target
Annual efficiency savings in real terms	3%
To recover the full operating cost for chargeable services of the Agency	100%
To achieve an improvement of 20% on 1998–99 level of income recovery from clients within 30 days of their receipt of a validated invoice from 75% to:	90%
To increase the proportion of undisputed supplier invoices paid in accordance with terms or 30 days from 95% to:	100%
To maintain a level of client satisfaction of—(Advisory)	95%-100%
Reduction in average unit cost per chargeable hour in real terms—(Litigation)	2.5%
Minimum average number of chargeable hours per caseholder per year—(Litigation)	1,150
Reduction in average unit cost per case in real terms—(Bona Vacantia)	2.5%

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he *(a)* has established and *(b)* published a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment. [94859]

Mr. Byers: The Government are committed to ensuring that their policies are fair and inclusive, and focus on public service users, not providers. This aim is contained in guidance (published in 1998) which helps Departments consider the impact of their policies by gender, ethnicity and disability. In addition to considering impact, the guidance encourages consultation with women's groups and others where appropriate and action to deal with any differential impact if this appears appropriate. My Department applies the principles set out in the guidance in developing its policies. For example, a gender impact assessment was included in the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Employment Relations Bill. We are also making increasing use of consultation, research projects and disaggregated statistics to identify the likely impact of policy.

Human Tissue Banks

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to fund human tissue banks in respect of humane research; and if he will make a statement. [95662]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* In the Comprehensive Spending Review the Medical Research Council was allocated £12 million to develop collections of donated human tissue and biological samples for use in research. The approach is designed to take account of anticipated rapid developments in genetic technologies and the benefits that might ensue from the completion of the human genome project in 2003. The MRC is currently working with the Wellcome Trust, other charities, and industry to consider all the implications of these developments.

Indebted Countries

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the *(a)* total debt owed, *(b)* debt written off, *(c)* balance outstanding, *(d)* interest accrued and *(e)* additional advances made, standing to the ECGD by each of the highly indebted poor countries for each of the financial years 1989–90 to 1998–99. [96059]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The table shows the latest available position in 1999 for debt owed, principal forgiven, interest accrued and overdue and the residual balance of amounts guaranteed for the current agreed list of highly indebted poor countries.

To answer the question for each of the years requested would incur disproportionate cost. However, the vast majority of the debt owing has been in existence prior to 1989, with movements occurring on amounts forgiven and interest.

Highly indebted poor countries

All figures £ million

Market	*Debt owing*	*Principal forgiven*	*Interest accrued and overdue*	*Amounts guaranteed*
Angola	60.89	—	51.84	—
Benin	2.69	5.22	—	—
Bolivia	11.55	38.39	—	—
Burkina Faso	0.97	1.94	—	—
Burundi	0	—	—	—
Central African Republic	0.33	0.24	—	—
Cameroon	72.07	9.46	—	—
Chad	0	—	—	—
Congo	140.48	—	1.60	—
Congo (Dr)	88.23	—	76.60	—
Cote D'Ivoire	31.61	6.57	—	12.38
Ethiopia	13.47	3.54	—	1.41
Equatorial Guinea	0	—	—	—
Ghana	1.92	—	—	215.26
Guinea	5.09	—	—	—
Guyana	43.94	78.97	—	—
Honduras	0	—	—	—
Kenya	36.39	—	—	20.14
Laos	0	—	—	—
Liberia	8.92	—	1.18	—
Madagascar	27.22	—	—	—
Malawi	3.42	—	—	—
Mali	4.07	7.47	—	—
Mauritania	6.68	0.56	0.15	—
Mozambique	89.52	17.6	—	—
Myanmar	23.07	—	—	—
Nicaragua	1.04	0.96	—	—
Niger	10.8	1.73	—	—
Principe and Sao Tome	0	—	—	—
Rwanda	0.1	—	—	—
Senegal	1.49	1.94	—	—
Sierra Leone	3.46	0.13	0.10	—
Somali Republic	15.66	—	12.27	—
Sudan	127.12	—	207.50	—
Tanzania	117.05	90.4	—	—
Togo	13.53	3.37	0.52	—
Uganda	5.69	18.01	—	—
Vietnam	10.38	10.39	—	43.96
Yemen	3.25	6.25	—	—
Zambia	195.31	68.8	—	—
Total	1,177.41	371.94	351.76	293.15

Government Office for the North East

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are currently employed at the Government Office for the North East; and what are its current annual administration costs. [96870]

Mr. Caborn: The Government Office for the North East (GO-NE) has a complement of 257 staff in the current year. As at 4 October 1999 there are 248.6 staff in post employed by GO-NE.

The Running Cost Budget for 1999–2000 is £8.2 million.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total number of jobs *(a)* created and *(b)* safeguarded by inward investment projects into *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the area covered by the Government Office for the North East in each year since 1995. [96734]

Mr. Caborn: The figures issued are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the companies' best estimate, at that time, of the number of jobs to be created/safeguarded by the investment in its first three years.

There is no requirement to notify the Department and so the figures include only those projects where the Department's Invest in Britain Bureau and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

Year/Region	*Number of projects*	*Total number of new jobs*	*Total number of safeguarded jobs*	*Total number of associated jobs*
1995–96				
UK	498	47,497	52,267	99,764
NE	62	6,075	7,433	13,508
1996–97				
UK	497	46,400	51,939	98,339
NE	46	3,089	4,529	7,618
1997–98				
UK	631	46,562	82,771	129,333
NE	47	2,649	9,890	12,539
1998–99				
UK	658	44,858	74,777	119,635
NE	35	2,304	6,953	9,257

Minimum Wage

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on enforcement of the national minimum wage. [96916]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The national minimum wage is in force and it must be paid by all employers. There is no hiding place for employers who act unlawfully and fail to pay it. I particularly welcome the recent employment tribunal decision, where a worker in a Bognor Regis sports shop became the first person to benefit from the enforcement officers' powers; that is, to take an employer to an employment tribunal and force them to pay the underpaid worker all the money that is owed them.

This power is over and above the powers of officers to issue enforcement and penalty notices against employers. Ten enforcement notices were issued in September, and £67,000 of back pay obtained for workers.

Horizon Project

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many sub-post offices he expects to close *(a)* in Eastbourne and *(b)* nationally as a result of the cancellation of the Horizon Project; [96964]

(2) what analysis he has made of the likely effect on the Post Office of the cancellation of the Horizon Project. [96966]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Horizon Project has not been cancelled, but has been put back on track by the Government to ensure that every Post Office throughout the network will be equipped with this modern, on-line computer platform by the spring of 2001.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the cost to industry of the climate change levy. [96696]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Any estimate of the impact of the levy will depend on the final rates of tax which will be set by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

However, the Government have promised that there will be significantly lower rates of the levy for those energy intensive sectors, covered by the EU Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive, which are prepared to enter negotiated agreements with the Government to deliver energy efficiency improvement and/or emissions reductions targets. To this end, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is leading discussions with a number of energy intensive sectors.

Mr. Robert[illegible]: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with industrialists about the likely costs of the climate change levy to their businesses. [96602]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have been holding discussions with a wide range of business on the implementation of the climate change levy. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met representatives of business on 20 October to hear at first hand their views on the levy.

Any estimate of the impact of the levy will depend on the final rates of tax which will be set by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of *(a)* EU Objective 1 and *(b)* EU Objective 2 programmes on UK economic development; and if he will make a statement. [95057]

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of EU Objective 1 and Objective 2 programmes on UK economic development. [95037]

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of *(a)* EU Objective 1 and *(b)* EU Objective 2 programmes on UK economic development; and if he will make a statement. [95067]

Mr. Caborn: In accordance with the requirements of the regulations governing the Structural Funds, all UK Objective 1 and Objective 2 programmes have been independently evaluated both at mid-term and at the end of the programmes to assess their impact on economic development. These evaluations are available from the programme secretariats.

Overall the Structural Funds make a valuable contribution to economic development in the United Kingdom.

Consumer Protection

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to improve consumer protection legislation. [96312]

Dr. Howells: The White Paper "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers" published in July set out in detail the various proposals to improve consumer protection legislation on which the Department is currently working.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Belize

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which Ministers in her Department visited Belize in each year from 1990 to 1997. [96174]

Clare Short: No Ministers from my Department or from the Overseas Development Administration visited Belize between 1990 and 1997.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the titles of official departmental reports being prepared with a view to publication in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000, stating in each case the planned date for publication. [95511]

Clare Short: The titles of official departmental reports being prepared with a view to publication in (a) 1999 and (b) 2000, with planned dates (where applicable), are shown in the tables.

1999

Country/Regional Strategy Papers	*Indicative Timing*
Africa	
Egypt	December 1999
Swaziland	Submission to the Secretary of State for discussion in November 1999
Botswana	
Namibia	
Lesotho	In abeyance pending political developments
Asia	
Cambodia	November 1999
Pakistan	On hold
Jordan	December 1999
West Bank—Gaza	December 1999

1999

Country/Regional Strategy Papers	*Indicative Timing*
Eastern Europe/FSU	
Bosnia	December 1999
Central Asia/South Caucasus	November 1999
Moldova	November 1999
Institutional Strategy Papers	
Working with the OCHA—the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs	November 1999
Working with UNRWA—the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East	November 1999
Target Strategy Papers	
International Development Strategy: Better Health for Poor People (consultation document)	November 1999
Final version of the above	To be confirmed
Others	
Statistics on International Development 1994–95 to 1998–99	16 December 1999

2000

Country/Regional Strategy Papers	*Indicative Timing*
Africa	
Gambia	Mid 2000
Nigeria	March 2000
Sierra Leone	Mid 2000 (depending on current military situation)
Asia	
Indonesia	June 2000
Latin America/Caribbean	
Mexico	Undecided
Belize	January 2000
Windward Islands	January 2000
Jamaica	April 2000
Eastern Europe/FSU	
Macedonia	June 2000
Albania	March 2000
Croatia	June 2000
Kosovo	January 2000
Institutional Strategy Papers	To be confirmed
Target Strategy Papers (consultation document plus final version)	
Targets statement	To be confirmed
Increased Economic Well-being	To be confirmed
Better Education	To be confirmed
Gender Equality	To be confirmed
Better Management of the Environment	To be confirmed
Water and Environmental Sanitation	To be confirmed
Good Governance	To be confirmed
Human Rights	To be confirmed
Others	
DFID Departmental Report 1999	March 2000
Statistics on International Development 1995–96 to 1999–2000	December 2000

Departmental Accounting

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the methods of depreciation her Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [96926]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) will be applying the straight line method of depreciation to fixed assets in preparing the balance sheet for the current financial year.

San Bushmen

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of her Department's funding to the Sasi it has spent on *(a)* health projects and *(b)* education for the San Bushmen of South Africa. [96400]

Clare Short: The South African San Institute (SASI) programme supported by DFID will help build the capacity of San communities to secure access to public health and education services. Funds have not been earmarked for health and education projects, but there will be health and education components to SASI supported activities in livelihood and cultural development, and to tackle substance abuse and violence against women and children.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work her Department has undertaken in South Africa in tackling alcohol abuse among the San Bushmen. [96401]

Clare Short: My Department is supporting the South African San Institute (SASI), which plans to develop rehabilitation and counselling services to deal with substance abuse.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to support the San Bushmen of South Africa. [96399]

Clare Short: My Department has assisted San communities in South Africa through the South African Government's Land Reform programme, which included advice on formulation of the successful land claim by the Southern Kalahari San, an indigenous San group located throughout the Mier area of South Africa near the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park.

Building on this support, my Department has made available £0.5 million to the South African San Institute (SASI) to help San communities create sustainable livelihoods and secure their constitutional rights to development and use of traditional language.

Arms Exports

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people are employed in her Department in examining arms exports licence applications. [97060]

Clare Short: There is one person employed in my Department on a full-time basis and three people who spend part of their time examining arms export licence applications. They draw on advice from DFID's regional, economic, and conflict and humanitarian affairs departments where necessary.

South Africa

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact on South Africa of the drop in the value of gold; and if she will make a statement. [96544]

Clare Short: Gold remains important for employment and export earnings but its relative contribution to the South African economy has been in decline for decades. Our development co-operation supports South Africa's efforts at economic diversification.

Serbia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to assist in the restoration of Serbia's *(a)* water, *(b)* electricity and *(c)* gas utilities. [95971]

Clare Short: We do not support the rehabilitation of utilities until there is a democratic government in place in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) who pursue internationally acceptable standards of conduct and meets their international obligations.

We are prepared to provide humanitarian assistance to help meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable on the basis of verified assessments and full accountability.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Publications

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list his Department's spending on official publications since May 1997. [93685]

Mr. Chris Smith: The spending on official publications since May 1997; which includes the costs incurred by the Department in publishing, preparation, production and purchase of copies for official use was £841,812.12. This excludes the cost of publications produced for internal use. Where the department makes use of a private sector publisher the publishing, printing and design costs are generally met by the publisher as part of their acceptance of the risks of publication.

	Spend £
May 1997-March 1998	338,760.90
April 1998-March 1999	288,099.82
April 1999–8 October 1999	214,951.40

The equivalent figure for April 1996-March 1997 was £501,366.85.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of proposals to increase the capacity of the new Wembley stadium to meet the criteria of the International Olympic Committee. [95433]

Kate Hoey: The current International Olympic Committee requirements for staging an Olympic Games are for 75,000 seats for the opening and closing ceremonies. The British Olympic Association (BOA) has indicated that a capacity of 80,000 should be provided for an Olympic bid to be credible. The design of the national stadium chosen by Wembley National Stadium Limited (WNSL) envisages special conversion of the stadium for staging athletics events and can provide 80,000 seats in athletics mode. WNSL have recently refined their detailed proposals for the stadium in athletics mode and I have asked Sport England and UK Sport to commission further detailed technical assessments of these latest proposals.

Works of Art

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions his Department has held with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on policy relating to the display of works of art during visits by foreign heads of state. [96342]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has held no such discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

British Museum

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he held with the British Museum authorities on arrangements for the visit to the Museum by President Jiang Zemin. [96341]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor any DCMS Minister or official had any such discussions with the British Museum.

BBC Licence Fee

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the proposal for a £24 licence supplement for BBC digital television. [96311]

Janet Anderson: In its report published on 5 August, the independent review panel on the future funding of the BBC has recommended that the Government should introduce, from next April, a digital licence supplement at the level of £1.99 a month (falling to 99p a month in 2006). A period of public consultation on the panel's recommendations has just concluded. The Government will consider all those recommendations in the light of the responses received and hopes to reach final decisions around the end of this year.

Tourism (Cornwall)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to make official visits to tourist resorts in Cornwall in the next 12 months. [95898]

Janet Anderson: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts and I have already made a number of official visits to Cornwall this year. These have included official visits to Falmouth, Newquay, Penzance, Newlyn and St. Ives. Ministers' diaries for the next 12 months have yet to be finalised. Invitations to make further visits to Cornwall will, of course, be given proper consideration. We are ever mindful of the importance of the tourist industry to the county of Cornwall, and will make supportive visits whenever we are able to do so.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the state of the tourist industry in Cornwall in the current year, with particular reference to the effects of the eclipse. [95902]

Janet Anderson: I understand from the West Country Tourist Board, which has contributed to a report, produced for the West Cornwall Leader Project, into the economic impact of the eclipse on Cornwall, that an additional 400,000 visitors were in Cornwall for the eclipse on 11 August. In addition, the event generated an extra £51 million of visitor expenditure within the county.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about the funding and marketing of the Cornish tourism industry. [95903]

Janet Anderson: The West Country Tourist Board, which covers Cornwall, is receiving £497,000 from the English Tourism Council this year for projects which contribute to the national tourism strategy. Cornwall, in common with parts of England, also benefits from the work of the British Tourist Authority (BTA) which promotes Britain as a visitor destination in overseas markets. The BTA is receiving £36 million from my Department this year.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy estimates that local authority expenditure on tourism promotion in Cornwall in 1997–98 was £1.954 million. In addition, the European Regional Development Fund and local partners have funded the West Cornwall Leader Project, which aims to assist sectors of the West Cornwall economy, including tourism and Prosper, the Training and Enterprise Council for Devon and Cornwall which provides information, advice and training services to small businesses in the region.

In addition, tourism in Cornwall has also benefited, both directly and indirectly, from the National Lottery (projects in the county have received awards totalling £84.1 million according to DCMS's National Lottery Awards Database) and from other funding from the European Regional Development Fund. Tourism in Cornwall will benefit further from January next year, having been granted European Union Objective 1 status.

Tourism

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food regarding the development of tourism in rural areas. [95901]

Janet Anderson: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) was one of several other Government departments we consulted when drawing up the tourism strategy document, "Tomorrow's Tourism", in view of that Department's strong interest in the economic vitality, conservation and public enjoyment of the countryside. We have maintained dialogue with MAFF regarding the future development of rural tourism policy, particularly with regard to farm diversification and the implementation of the European Commission's proposed Rural Development Regulation. We are also liaising with MAFF and others regarding the preparations for the Tourism Summit in March 2000, and the forthcoming Rural White Paper.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the relationship of the value of tourism to the holding of major sporting events. [96013]

Janet Anderson: A 1997 study by the UK, English and Scottish Sports Councils examined the economic impact of six major sporting events throughout the UK. It concluded that much of the additional expenditure earned by these events was contributed by tourists, in addition to the expenditure by competitors and officials themselves.

The Government's tourism strategy, "Tomorrow's Tourism", pointed to the boost given by Euro '96 to UK tourism and underlined our commitment to bringing major international sporting events to this country. That is why I have agreed with my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport that the British Tourist Authority will produce a sports tourism strategy by the end of this year to complement the Government's forthcoming sports strategy and to help to maximise the tourism benefits accruing from major sporting events in the UK.

Accommodation Rating System

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to encourage the extension of the new accommodation rating system to the whole of the UK. [95905]

Janet Anderson: My immediate priority is to ensure that the new system in England is successful in raising quality standards and meeting consumer expectations. However, we are approaching the Scottish and Welsh Administrations following the report of the Scottish Affairs Committee to look again together at our respective schemes, the differences between them and the scope for arriving at common standards.

Drugs and Sport

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions has he had with the National Drugs Co-ordinator about drugs and sport. [95906]

Kate Hoey: I have had useful discussion on the issue of drugs in sport with the National Drugs Co-ordinator and will continue to work closely with him and others on this important matter.

The Permanent Secretary of the DCMS met recently with Keith Hellawell and General Barry McCaffrey, the Director of the White House National Drug Control Policy, and had fruitful discussions on the issue of doping in sport. Officials from this Department will be meeting

with officials from the Anti Drug Co-ordination Unit and Sport England in the near future to discuss further how we can promote the role of sport in this area.

Trafalgar Square

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he expects to make an announcement about what will stand on the vacant plinth in Trafalgar square. [95907]

Mr. Alan Howarth: An advisory group has been set up under the chairmanship of Sir John Mortimer to advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the future of the vacant plinth in Trafalgar square. The group is expected to make its recommendations during the spring of next year.

Internet

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what evaluation the Creative Task Force has made of the impact of the internet; and if he will make a statement. [95908]

Janet Anderson: The Creative Industries Task Force has set up an inquiry to examine the impact of the internet on the following creative industry sectors: radio, design, advertising, newspaper and magazine publishing, and the cultural industries (literature, performing arts, fine art). This work is in addition to initiatives taken by other Government Departments with other parts of the creative industries.

The aims of the inquiry are:

to identify the opportunities, threats and barriers to growth which the internet brings for creative SMEs in these sectors;

to consider the future environment and developments in technology and infrastructure to gauge how SMEs in these sectors can move to anticipate and exploit the opportunities that arise; and

to ensure that use of the internet in these sectors (by consumers, businesses and organisations) can be measured and tracked effectively.

The inquiry is chaired by Robert Devereux, a Creative Industries Task Force member.

It will, subject to Creative Industries Task Force approval, be published by Spring 2000 and will include recommendations to Government and others on actions to be pursued.

Hotel Charges Group

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he expects the Hotel Charges Group to present its findings; and if its report will be made public. [95899]

Janet Anderson: The Tourism Consumer Group has been asked to concentrate initially on five issues: the clarity of information on hotel charges and prices in general; the clarity of charges for telephones in hotel bedrooms; the imposition of single person supplements, and the quality of accommodation for single occupants; how the industry handles customer complaints; and whether the Tourism (Sleeping Accommodation Price Display) Order 1977 now requires updating.

I expect the Group to make recommendations on these subjects in good time for the inaugural Tourism Summit next year. Its recommendations will be made public.

UK European Capital of Culture

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport who will determine the criteria for choosing the UK's European Capital of Culture; and by whom the decision will be made. [95904]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The selection criteria for the UK's European Capital of Culture will be determined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in consultation with ministerial colleagues. An announcement will be made in due course. The UK's nomination for the European Capital of Culture will be formally approved by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people in the West Midlands area are currently on the waiting list for the processing of their disability living allowance claims; [96040]

(2) what is the current length of time taken to process disability living allowance claims; and if he will make a statement. [96039]

Mr. Bayley: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Joan Walley, dated 1 November 1999:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions. You asked how many people in the West Midlands area are currently on the waiting list for the processing of their Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claims and what is the current length of time taken to process DLA claims.

The Benefits Agency (BA) do not keep data in the requested format. However, we do have data relating to the Disability Benefits Centre (DBC) which includes the West Midlands.

At 22 October 1999, the number of new DLA claims awaiting processing by Midlands DBC is 9,433.

At 30 September 1999, the current national average time taken to process DLA claims is 38.72 days for new claims against the BA target for clearing new claims of 85% in 53 days. For claims made under the special rules, that is, for those people who have a life expectancy of six months or less, the average clearance time is 7.43 days against BA target of 80% in 10 days.

I hope this is helpful.

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he *(a)* has established and *(b)* published a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on Equal Treatment. [94860]

Angela Eagle: We are committed to ensuring that its policies are fair and inclusive, and focus on public service users, not providers. This aim is contained in guidance (published in 1998) which helps Departments consider the impact of their policies on gender, ethnicity and disability. In addition to considering impact, the guidance

encourages consultation with women's groups and others where appropriate and action to deal with any differential impact if this appears necessary.

In July 1998 this Department published our policy appraisal "Women and Social Security" which analysed how women's roles have changed since the inception of the Social Security system and what we have done and need to do to meet those changed needs. We also apply the principles described in the Equal Treatment guidance in developing our policies.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received *(a)* on the 48 hour rule for claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance and *(b)* on the treatment of expenses payments to claimants who are doing voluntary work; and if he will make a statement. [96095]

Angela Eagle: We have received a number of representations, generally, and in connection with the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team on Community Self-Help, on both the 48 hour rule and the treatment of volunteers' expenses in Jobseeker's Allowance.

We recognise that voluntary work can play a significant role in preparing individuals to enter work, particularly those who have been out of the labour market for some time. Officials from this Department meet regularly with officials from the Department for Education and Employment and the voluntary sector to see what practical steps can be taken to encourage volunteering. Examples of changes that have been made as a result of these discussions are revised guidance to operational staff and an information poster promoting volunteering for public display in all jobcentres.

Any changes to the benefits system must be in line with our wider welfare to work initiative which has work at its centre and envisages full participation in the labour market for those who are able to do so.

Child Support Agency

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents with care will receive less money than their present maintenance assessment under the Government's new formula for the CSA. [96564]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns *957–58*.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the treatment of redundancy payments which have been promised but not yet been received when assessing entitlement for means-tested benefits. [96591]

Angela Eagle: I announced in the House on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 698, that we intend to bring forward regulations at the earliest opportunity to ensure that, in future, Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support will not be refused because of earnings owed to people when their job ends. This will apply whether or not the employer is insolvent.

Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Working Families Tax Credit are not affected by unpaid redundancy payments.

Departmental Asset Sales

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the assets sold by his Department and their value, item by item, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99; and if he will estimate the value of asset sales planned to be made in 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [96276]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the written answer the then Minister of State gave the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *672*. During the period 1 April 1991 and 30 November 1997 there were no major asset sales. Details of minor asset sales during this period have not been collected on the grounds of disproportionate cost. There have been no major asset sales since January 1999 and none are planned for the remainder of 1999–2000 or during 2000–01.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what provision his Department has made for the payment of social security benefits to asylum seekers during the financial year 2000–01; [96943]

(2) how much was paid in social security benefits to asylum seekers in each financial year since 31 March 1992; [96941]

(3) what is his estimate of the amount paid in social security benefits to asylum seekers so far during 1999–2000 and his estimate of the likely total of such expenditure for the entire financial year 1999–2000. [96942]

Mr. Bayley: The full details of the transitional arrangements for those asylum seekers who are receiving Social Security benefits when the new support arrangements are introduced in April 2000 have yet to be finalised. However, an asylum seeker receiving benefit will continue to receive benefit until a relevant change of circumstances, such as a negative decision on their asylum application. If an asylum seeker is refused either asylum or exceptional leave prior to April 2000 he will be able to apply to a Local Authority for support under the interim arrangements provided for in the Bill. An asylum seeker refused asylum or exceptional leave after 1 April 2000 will be able to apply for support to the Home Office's Asylum Support Directorate.

We will bring forward our detailed proposals for the transitional arrangements shortly.

Estimates for 1992–93 expenditure are not available. Such information as is available is in the table.

Asylum seekers—estimated annual expenditure, Great Britain

£ million

Year	Total estimated annual expenditure	Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance (IB)	Housing Benefit	Council Tax Benefit
1993–94	340	160	175	5
1994–95	360	180	175	5
1995–96	420	205	205	10
1996–97	400	195	195	10
1997–98	305	150	145	10
1998–99	285	150	125	10

Notes:

1. Estimated annual expenditure figures are rounded to the nearest five million pounds. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
2. Estimates for Income Support February 1997 onwards will include a number of non-asylum seekers which receive Urgent Case Payments for other reasons.
3. Annual expenditure figures for Income Support have been based on an average of four quarters for the relevant financial year, using number of cases and average weekly amounts.
4. Expenditure figures for Housing Benefit are estimates and have been calculated using the Housing Benefit Management Information System 1 per cent. sample and Departmental Reports. Estimates are based only on cases recorded on the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry as being asylum seekers. They therefore exclude other claimants in receipt of Urgent Case Payments who may in fact be asylum seekers, but are not identified as such and they exclude any asylum seekers in receipt of Housing Benefit who are not in receipt of Income Support, although the number of these cases is thought to be very small.
5. Figures for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit 1993–94 to 1997–98 are actual out-turns and 1998–99 figures are estimated out-turns.

Source:

1. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries, May 1993 to February 1999.
2. Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics Quarterly Enquiries, May 1997 to February 1999.
3. Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample of claimants in receipt of Income Support, at the end of May in each year given.
4. Departmental Report.

The amount paid in Social Security benefits to asylum seekers is dependent on various factors including asylum applications intake, asylum decisions, and the size of the asylum backlog of outstanding cases. It is estimated that the cost of benefits for asylum seekers between April 1999 and September 1999 inclusive is in the range of £120 million to £150 million.

We estimate that the total cost of benefits for asylum seekers in 1999–2000 will be in the range of £215-£295 million.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [96910]

Mr. Rooker: The Department depreciates fixed assets in accordance with Statement of Standard Accounting Practise (SSAP) 12 and HM Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual. Depreciation is provided on all tangible fixed assets, using the straight line method, at rates calculated to write off, in equal instalments, the current replacement cost (less any estimated residual value) of each asset over the expected useful life. Fixed assets are depreciated from the month following acquisition. No depreciation is charged in the month of disposal.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his oral answer of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 693, if he will give the sources underlying his statement regarding the proportion of incapacity benefit recipients with occupational pensions who are in the top income brackets; and if he is referring to individual or household income. [96841]

Mr. Bayley *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The information referred to was based on equivalised household income data from the Department's Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series, the source for which was the Family Resources Survey 1996–97.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement regarding his proposals to abolish carry-forward and carry-back in respect of the stakeholder pension. [96895]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The proposal to remove the carry-forward and carry-back facility forms part of the current public consultations on stakeholder pensions. We will announce our intentions when we have considered the responses to the consultation.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Asset Sales

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the assets sold by the Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies, and their value, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99; and if he will estimate the value of asset sales planned to be made in the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [96406]

Jane Kennedy: Details of the proceeds from major asset sales (which are all property) during the periods 1991–92 to 1998–99 in respect of the Department and its agencies are listed in the table together with forecast sales for 1999–2001. The table does not include the sale of magistrates court buildings as these are the responsibility of the local authority as owners, nor does it include the Department's Executive Non Departmental Public Body. Minor and routine other sales are also excluded because they are relatively insignificant.

Lord Chancellor's Department: value of asset sales

	Description	Value (£)
1991–94	[1]—	—
1994–95	4 properties	882,422
1995–96	8 properties	26,169,957
1996–97	4 properties	2,019,000

Lord Chancellor's Department: value of asset sales

	Description	*Value (£)*
1997–98	6 properties	460,101
1998–99	4 properties	1,723,000
1999–2000	[2]2 properties	261,018
1999–2001	8 property sales are planned	[3]6,785,000

[1] Information held centrally indicates that no significant disposals took place
[2] To date
[3] Estimate

County Courts

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received concerning the proposed closure of Chepstow and Monmouth county courts. [96534]

Jane Kennedy: To date, 31 representations have been received on the proposal to close Monmouth county court, of which 29 objected to the proposal. There have been 22 representations received on the proposal to close Chepstow county court, of which 20 objected to the proposal.

Public Record Office

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what statutory duties the Keeper of Public Records has in respect of facilities for inspecting and obtaining copies of records in the Public Record Office; how many applications the Keeper has received since May 1997 from members of the public to inspect and copy the decennial census returns for England and Wales for *(a)* 1901 and *(b)* 1911; and how she responded to those applications. [96457]

Mr. Lock: The statutory duties of the Keeper of Public Records in respect of facilities for inspecting and obtaining copies of records in the Public Record Office are laid down in section 5 of the Public Records Act, 1958, as amended. Subsection 3 of that section provides that, subject to certain exceptions,

> "it shall be the duty of the Keeper of Public Records to arrange that reasonable facilities are available to the public for inspecting and obtaining copies of public records in the Public Record Office."

The Public Record Office does not keep a record of applications from members of the public to inspect and copy the decennial census returns for England and Wales for 1901 and 1911. Such applications are referred to the Office for National Statistics, which has custody of the 1901 and 1911 census returns.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the planned time-scale for implementation of the EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive on uncultivated land and semi-natural areas in England; [93735]

(2) what measures he plans to prevent pre-emptive ploughing of uncultivated and semi-natural land prior to the implementation of the EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive; and if he will make a statement. [93734]

Mr. Morley: The Government are fully aware of the need to meet EU obligations arising from the EIA Directive. However, important questions which seek to clarify the exact nature of those obligations are currently being addressed by the European Court of Justice. These may well affect the preparatory work already carried out in close consultation with the statutory environmental agencies and other Agriculture Departments.

I share concern about the risk that some pre-emptive action might be taken during the necessary public consultation period. However, there can be no question of introducing an implementation regime without consulting representatives of those who will be directly affected by it, as well as conservation and other important public interests.

Beef (School Menus)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is taking to encourage local education authorities to provide British beef on school menus; and if he will make a statement. [93716]

Ms Quin: Ultimately it is for Local Authorities themselves to decide whether or not to have beef, or indeed any other food products, on school menus. Nevertheless, my right hon. Friend the Minister has recently written to all Local Education Authorities setting out the case for British beef. A copy of this letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Oral Statements

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the reports published by his Department and its associated bodies, *(b)* the reports received from bodies set up by his Department, *(c)* the decisions his Department has taken and *(d)* events in the UK and elsewhere, since 27 July, which satisfied the criteria he uses for deciding whether to apply to make oral statements to the House when the House is sitting. [93977]

Mr. Nick Brown: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council on 19 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *429*.

On 20 September I announced a support package for farmers. The full text of my announcement was made available by MAFF news release.

Glyphosate

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what data he has collated on the effects of glyphosate used as a herbicide; what assessment he has made of recent research studies carried out by EU advisors; and if he will make a statement. [94830]

Ms Quin: All pesticides, including those herbicides with glyphosate as their active substance, used here must be approved for the purpose by Ministers in the

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We only approve a pesticide after rigorous evaluation of scientific data to show that it is both efficacious and can be used safely with regard to human health and the environment.

Glyphosate is currently being reviewed by the EU Commission as part of a programme to ensure that all agricultural pesticides currently on the market in the EU meet current standards. An initial assessment of the human and environmental safety of glyphosate undertaken by the German authorities on behalf of the Commission is currently being peer-reviewed by experts from a number of other Member States.

Animal Exports

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to report progress on regulations dealing with the treatment of live animals on the Continent after export from the United Kingdom. [93257]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 October 1999]:* The rules governing conditions for animals in transit within the EU are set out in Directive 91/628, as amended in 1995.

We have carried out a public consultation on our proposals to review the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, which implements the Directive on our territory. The deadline for comment was 8 October, and we are carefully considering the responses made before deciding how to proceed.

Any amendment to the fundamental requirements about the conditions to be provided for animals in transit within the EU will require an amendment to the Directive itself. The Directive contains a requirement for the European Commission to initiate a review during 1999 and, if necessary, to bring forward proposals to revise the Directive. We attach importance to this review, and look to the Commission to bring it forward.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to revise the regulations for animal exports relating to conditions in transit during overland transport in Europe. [96527]

Mr. Morley: The rules governing conditions for animals in transit within the EU are set out in Directive 91/628, as amended in 1995.

We have carried out a public consultation on our proposals to review the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, which implements the Directive on our territory. The deadline for comment was 8 October, and we are carefully considering the responses made before deciding how to proceed.

Any amendment of the fundamental requirements about the conditions to be provided for animals in transit within the EU will require an amendment to the Directive itself. The Directive contains a requirement for the European Commission to initiate a review during 1999 and, if necessary, to bring forward proposals to revise the Directive. We attach importance to this review, and look to the Commission to bring it forward.

Milk Marque

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will permit Milk Marque to continue to sell surplus produce to *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Netherlands. [95788]

Ms Quin: Following publication of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply in Great Britain of raw cows' milk, this is a matter for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the competition authorities. I have no locus in this matter. Trade within the EU is allowed subject to compliance with competition and other rules.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the impact of his proposals regarding Milk Marque on the price paid to farmers for the milk they produce; and if he will make a statement. [96603]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister has made no proposals regarding Milk Marque. There should not be an adverse effect on prices of Milk Marque's own action taken in response to the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's response to it.

Sheep

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the size of the sheep flock in Cumbria *(a)* at present and *(b)* in each of the last five years. [95749]

Ms Quin: The figures for the sheep breeding flock and all sheep and lambs in Cumbria are given for the period from June 1993 to June 1998.

	Sheep breeding flock	*Total sheep and lambs*
June 1993	1,271,741	2,695,724
June 1994	1,267,248	2,677,013
June 1995	1,253,766	2,663,066
June 1996	1,237,833	2,621,297
June 1997	1,262,823	2,692,223
June 1998	1,301,724	2,807,546

Notes:

The figures are taken from the June Agricultural and Horticultural Census. The data relate to main holdings only.

County level figures for June 1999 are not yet available. They will be published on the MAFF website and can be found by selecting 'Statistics'. 'Publications', 'June 1999 Census analyses' and then 'Regions and Counties—Livestock: Sheep'.

BSE Inquiry

Dan Norris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total cost to date of the BSE inquiry. [95529]

Ms Quin: The total cost to date of the BSE Inquiry, including the costs of liaison units and legal support for witnesses from the main departments involved, is approaching £20 million.

British Beef

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government plan to take to improve the export market for British beef. [95757]

Ms Quin: We have set up a Beef Export Liaison Group with those involved in beef exports in order to monitor the progress of the Date Based Export Scheme and identify and exploit key export markets. We are also in contact with a number of third countries to obtain export clearance.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the monthly figures for the export of British beef, by country of destination, since the formal lifting of the ban on exports. [96294]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister to my hon. Friend for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on 21 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns 570–71.

Dairy Farmers

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Government help available for dairy farmers. [95761]

Ms Quin: Dairy farmers receive help from the CAP dairy regime. They will also benefit from the Government's package of support measures, which includes the suspension of the £7 charge for cattle passports which will be met by Government until 2002–03 at the earliest.

Meat Exports

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the meat produced in the UK has been exported during each of the last five years. [96252]

Ms Quin: The information requested is shown in the table.

	Home production of meat [1] *(th. tonnes)*	*Carcase meat exports* [2] *(th. tonnes)*	*Live exports* [3] *(th. tonnes)*	*Total exports as a % of production*
1994	3,756.2	613.2	112.3	19.3
1995	3,840.9	778.5	104.8	23.0
1996	3,596.0	534.5	80.3	17.1
1997	3,682.2	564.7	56.1	16.9
1998[4]	3,784.6	585.3	53.6	16.9

[1] Carcase meat, bacon, ham and poultry meat. Includes the meat equivalent of live exports. Excludes offal.
[2] Expressed in carcase weight equivalent. Excludes exports of preserved or manufactured meat products. May include some re-exports of meat previously imported into the UK.
[3] Meat equivalent of live exports other than pure-bred. Adjusted as necessary for unrecorded trade.
[4] Provisional.

Meat Imports

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures the Government are taking to ensure that imports of meat are produced under the same food safety and animal welfare standards as British produced meat. [95760]

Ms Quin: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 21 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 558.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those United Kingdom organisations that will be consulted in consequence of Com (99) 382, on closer co-operation with the fishing industry; what Her Majesty's Government's policy was on such closer co-operation; and if he will make a statement. [96501]

Mr. Morley: The proposal in Com (99) 382 on closer dialogue with the fishing industry concerns financial matters arising from the European Commission's reorganisation of its Advisory Committee on Fisheries (ACF) so as to focus on communication and consultation with EC-level rather than national organisations. It will be for the European organisations represented on the ACF to consult as they consider necessary with national organisations in individual member states. Representations on the ACF cover fishermen, fish farmers, processors and wholesalers, trade unions, and consumer, environment and development non-governmental organisations. Representatives of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation have been included as Europeche nominees in the plenary committee and working groups of the ACF.

The Government welcome ways of strengthening the dialogue with the industry and broadening the range of activity. Thus I have made clear that consultation at the regional level must be strengthened in parallel with consultation through the ACF.

Decommissioning

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries which are held by the European Commission not to have upheld MAGP IV limits; and if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy thereon. [96585]

Mr. Morley: The latest available information published by the Commission was in its Annual Report to the Council and to the European Parliament on the results of the multi annual guidance programmes for the fishing fleet at the end of 1997. A copy is in the Library (ref. COM 175/1999). This showed that two countries (France and Netherlands) had failed to meet the objectives of the MAGP III by the end of 1997 and were not on target to meet their objectives for MAGP IV. The report also noted that the status for Italy could not be determined because of a major revision of their fleet register.

Set-aside Payments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many annual payments to individual farms for set-aside land exceeded *(a)* £25,000, *(b)* £100,000, *(c)* £250,000 and *(d)* £1,000,000 per annum in each of the past four years. [95817]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* Set-aside payments under the Arable Area Payments Scheme are made in respect of claims which may include one or more individual farms. Records therefore relate to claims paid rather than numbers of farms. The following is the information requested in respect of the set-aside element of each claim paid by MAFF in 1995–98 (with figures given on a cumulative basis—ie lines *(b)* to *(d)* are included in *(a)* etc.):

Number of payments exceeding	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
(a) £25,000	673	401	139	111
(b) £100,000	11	12	3	2
(c) £250,000	2	0	0	0
(d) £1,000,000	0	0	0	0

Animal Feed

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce legislation to require animal feed containing GM ingredients or derivatives to be labelled. [96209]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* Legislation on animal feed is harmonised in the EU and the Government cannot therefore take unilateral action on compulsory labelling. This is expected to be covered in a forthcoming Novel Feeds Regulation, which the Minister has been pressing the Commission to bring forward as soon as possible. In the meantime, the Government are exploring the possibility of voluntary national labelling arrangements with the feed trade, farmers and retailers.

Fox Hunting

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will examine whether future farm support can be tied to a policy of not allowing hunting on recipients' land. [96293]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The Government's position on hunting was set out in the reply by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *715*. For so long as hunting remains legal, there would be no grounds for withholding agricultural support payments from those who allow hunting on their land.

Forest Land

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to his answer of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *714*, on forest land, what assessment he has made of the consultation process relating to the sale of Chepstow Park Wood; and if the sale constituted an open sale. [96516]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The subject of this question relates to a matter for the National Assembly of Wales.

Coastal Whaling (Ireland)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if the Government oppose proposals put forward by the Government of Ireland that would permit coastal whaling; and if he will make a statement; [96336]

(2) if it is Her Majesty's Government's policy to oppose the Irish Government's compromise proposals to allow the resumption of coastal whaling, put to this year's International Whaling Commission; and if he will make a statement. [96334]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) on 9 June 1999, *Official Report*, columns *348–50*.

Fisheries

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) with which EU member states he has discussed the prospect of zonal/regional fisheries management; and what interpretation of this management he has used in these discussions; [96879]

(2) when he last met his opposite numbers in other EU member states to discuss the prospect of zonal or regional management of fisheries waters. [96880]

Mr. Morley: I regularly discuss regional aspects of Common Fisheries Policy management with my opposite numbers in other EU member states. In all those contacts I have made clear the need to enhance the regional dimension of the CFP through increased involvement of the stake holders in the management process; greater focus on management problems on a regional specific fishery basis; closer links between fishermen and scientists; and the ability to act rapidly when confronted with conservation emergencies affecting a particular fishery.

BSE

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the latest scientific evidence on the presence of the BSE prion within *(a)* the dorsal root ganglia and *(b)* marrow of cattle. [96297]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The results of the BSE pathogenesis study which described the detection of infectivity in dorsal root ganglia and bone marrow of orally infected cattle were reported in the following two articles:

"Preliminary observations on the pathogenesis of experimental bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)": by G.A.H. Wells and others. (The Veterinary Record, 1998/Vol. 142/31/1/1998, pp. 103–106).

"Limited detection of sternal bone marrow infectivity in the clinical phase of experimental bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)": by G.A.H. Wells and others. (The Veterinary Record, 1999/Vol. 144/13/3/1999, pp. 292–294).

There are no new results to report.

Agricultural Competitiveness

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives his Department is providing to boost the competitiveness of the UK's agriculture industry in Europe. [96259]

Ms Quin: The Government are seeking to assist UK agriculture to be more competitive in Europe on several fronts.

The foundation of a competitive industry must be the macro-economic stability which the Government have achieved and which brings low levels of inflation and interest rates. We have built on this foundation by investing in research and development, pursuing the Government's policy of training, education and lifelong learning, establishing the Food Chain Group earlier this year whose aim is to bring the food chain close together, launching a joint campaign (with the National Farmers' Union (NFU)) to encourage more collaborative marketing, and launching a further joint initiative with the NFU to review regulatory burdens on the industry.

Furthermore, my right hon. Friend announced a substantial package of aid on 20 September which included £150 million of new money for the industry. This included the waiving of specified risk material charges and cattle passport charges until at least 2001/02, and £1 million aimed directly at support for marketing. Most recently, my right hon. Friend announced on 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 1128, that we have secured a further £5 million in marketing aid.

Complementary Veterinary Services

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will amend the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 in order to allow non-vets to carry out acupuncture and homeopathy on animals. [91992]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 21 July 1999]:* The authorisation of practitioners of alternative medicine under the Act is limited to the provision of physiotherapy to animals which are under the care of a veterinary surgeon. Such treatment can be authorised only if it is prescribed by that veterinary surgeon. At present, there are no plans to implement further regulatory arrangements recognising or authorising practitioners of alternative medicine to carry out acts of veterinary surgery.

Fishing Safety Grants

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the oral answer of 21 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 564, when he plans to reinstate the fishing safety grants; and if he will make a statement. [95768]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The Government are currently considering the issue of reinstating a scheme of grants for safety equipment for vessels, in particular in the context of any funding available for the programme of structural measures currently under negotiation in the Fisheries Council. As this would be a new scheme, all options are under consideration.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment she has made of the warning by the Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation relating to Year 2000 compliance of local authorities' housing benefit systems. [95216]

Mrs. Beckett: I am replying as the responsible Minister. The compliance of local authority systems has been independently assessed by the Audit Commission, with Government Offices in the Regions acting as responsible bodies. This took place as part of Action 2000's National Infrastructure Forum programme of independent assessment, reported on 21 October, when all but a very few UK infrastructure organisations were rated "blue", which means there is no identified risk of material disruption. All sectors are expected to be "blue" by mid November.

I have placed a copy of the report of the Forum, which contains a full account of the assessment process for all these sectors, in the Libraries of the House. Local authorities in England were rated "blue" in this report, which means that as well as having completed their compliance programme, they also have business continuity plans to deal with any unexpected events. Under this assessment, payment of housing benefit should not be at risk.

Government Consultation Document

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps she is taking to improve the despatch of Government consultation documents to organisations and individuals requesting them. [96533]

Marjorie Mowlam: Last year we published a guide on the conduct of written consultation exercises setting out best practice for departments and agencies, and we are now evaluating it. In carrying out the evaluation, we will ensure that improving the despatch of consultation documents receives attention. The results of the evaluation will be made public in due course.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total number of employees who will be eligible for a working families tax credit in 2000–01. [95812]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* Excluding families just with self employed workers, about 1.2 million families will be in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit in 2000–01, the first full year of the credit.

European Investment Bank

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the European Investment Bank is subject to the scrutiny of the European Union's Court of Auditors; and if he will make a statement. [96036]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As an autonomous institution, the EIB is not accountable to the Court of Auditors in respect of its own resources. Under its Statute the Bank is accountable to its own governing bodies, including an independent Audit Committee which reports directly to

the Board of Governors (comprised of Finance Ministers of the member states). The Bank's accounts are submitted to internal and external auditors.

In respect of activities which the EIB carries out using Community Budgetary resources, the Bank is subject to the Court of Auditors in accordance with Article 248 of the EC Treaty.

EU Finance Ministers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the withholding tax was discussed at the meeting of EU Finance Ministers on 13 and 14 October; what views Her Majesty's Government expressed thereon; when the withholding tax will next be discussed by EU Finance Ministers; and what support there has been for his proposal to exempt the eurobond market from the tax; [96503]

(2) what matters were discussed at the meeting of EU Finance Ministers on 13 and 14 October; if he will make a statement thereon; when tax matters will next be discussed by EU Finance Ministers; and if he will list the tax matters concerned. [96477]

Dawn Primarolo: There was no meeting of EU Finance Ministers on 13 and 14 October.

Demography

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the numbers of people of working age as a percentage of those over the state retirement age for each of the last 20 years. [96764]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 2 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the numbers and percentage of workers in firms employed in different size bands.

The information requested is available from the Annual Employment Survey (AES) at September 1997 (latest available date) for the size bands shown.

Employee Jobs[1] at September 1997, Great Britain

	Thousand	*Percentage*
Size band 1–10	4,528	20
Size band 11–49	5,787	26
Size band 50–99	2,695	12
Size band 100 and over	9,523	42

[1] Figures exclude Agriculture as the way that information is supplied would distort the size band analysis

Business Taxation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the work of the EU Working Group on the Code of Conduct for Business Taxation since July; and if he will list the measures currently under consideration to tackle harmful tax competition. [96506]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) on 13 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *182*.

Valuation Office Agency

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the five-yearly review of the Valuation Office Agency will commence. [97132]

Dawn Primarolo: The review of the Agency status of the Valuation Office will commence on 2 November 1999. The performance of the Valuation Office will be evaluated and its activities will be subjected to the normal prior option tests set out in the 1993 "Next Steps Review" (Cm 2430). The review will also take account of the recommendations made by the Treasury Sub-Committee in their report published on 28 October 1999.

The review team would welcome comments and contributions from those with an interest in the Valuation Office and its work. People should send their review by 31 January 2000 to:

Suzanne Hardy
Valuation Office Review
Inland Revenue
Room 108 New Wing
Somerset House
Strand
London WC2R 1LB
Fax: 0207 438 7134
E-Mail voareview@ir.gsi.gov.uk

VAT (Italy)

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he has taken to ensure that Italy meets its obligations under the VAT Directive requiring each EU member state to refund VAT to businesses in other EU countries; and if he will make a statement. [96702]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* It is for the European Commission to ensure that member states meet their obligations under EU Directives. However, the UK Permanent Representation to the EU has made representations to the Commission on behalf of five UK businesses about delays in obtaining refunds from Italy. The Embassy in Rome has also made inquiries of the Italian authorities on behalf of UK businesses.

EU Budget

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate for each member state of the EU *(a)* net and gross contributions to the EU Budget for the last year for which figures are available, including net receipts and *(b)* the break down of net and gross contributions by household and population. [97091]

Miss Melanie Johnson: 1997 is the latest year for which information about member states' contributions and receipts is available. The information requested, in respect of that year, is set out in the table. The amounts shown are in European Currency Units, the unit of account for the EC Budget.

Contributions to and receipts from the EC budget in 1997

	Gross contribution (mecu)	Receipts (mecu)	Net contribution/ receipt [1] (mecu)	Population (millions)	Number of households (millions)	Gross contribution per head (ecu)	Gross contribution per household (ecu)	Receipts per head (ecu)	Receipts per household (ecu)	Net contribution per head (ecu)	Net contribution per household (ecu)
Belgium	2,971.4	1,981.7	989.7	10.2	4.0	291.5	751.7	194.4	501.3	97.1	250.4
Denmark	1,505.8	1,529.8	[1]24.0	5.2	2.3	287.0	662.2	291.6	672.7	[1]4.6	[1]10.6
Germany	21,217.3	9,989.2	11,228.1	82.1	35.2	258.4	602.0	121.7	283.4	136.8	318.6
Greece	1,178.4	5,372.4	[1]4,194.0	10.5	3.2	111.9	367.8	510.2	1,676.8	[1]398.3	[1]1,309.0
Spain	5,367.6	11,218.1	[1]5,850.5	39.3	11.8	136.5	453.5	285.4	947.8	[1]148.8	[1]494.3
France	13,185.9	12,200.9	985.0	58.6	21.5	225.0	612.1	208.2	566.4	16.8	45.7
Ireland	687.0	3,310.6	[1]2,623.6	3.6	1.0	191.7	667.6	923.7	3,217.3	[1]732.0	[1]2,549.7
Italy	8,667.1	8,344.0	323.1	57.4	19.9	151.1	435.3	145.4	419.1	5.6	16.2
Luxembourg	170.7	106.1	64.6	0.4	0.1	415.3	1,177.2	258.2	731.7	157.2	445.5
Netherlands	4,837.6	2,488.9	2,348.7	15.5	6.2	311.4	785.1	160.2	403.9	151.2	381.2
Austria	2,110.4	1,317.6	792.8	8.1	3.0	260.5	700.4	162.7	437.3	97.9	263.1
Portugal	1,077.8	3,690.1	[1]2,612.3	9.9	3.1	109.4	342.6	374.4	1,172.9	[1]265.0	[1]830.4
Finland	1,064.1	1,068.8	[1]4.7	5.1	2.0	207.6	522.4	208.5	524.7	[1]0.9	[1]2.3
Sweden	2,326.0	1,099.2	1,226.8	8.9	3.8	260.8	607.3	123.2	287.0	137.5	320.3
UK	8,925.9	7,092.2	1,833.7	59.0	22.4	151.3	398.1	120.2	316.3	31.1	81.8

[1] Denotes net recipient

Notes:

1. The Court of Auditors uses ecu figures, the unit of account for the EC Budget.
2. Gross contribution figures are after account has been taken of the UK's abatement (including corrections in respect of earlier years) and for adjustments to VAT and GNP-based contributions in respect of earlier years.
3. Receipts figures include European Commission payments made direct to the member state's private sector.
4. The Court of Auditors Report does not allocate all Community spending to the member states so that the receipts figures in the table may not represent the full amount of expenditure by the Commission in each member state. Consequently the figures for net contributions/net benefits in the table are likely only to be indicative of the amount of member states' net positions. For example, if all administrative expenditure were allocated to the country in which it is paid, the net position of Belgium and Luxembourg would be substantially improved.

Source:

Contributions and receipts data taken from Court of Auditors Report on 1997 Community Budget. Population data, relating to 1997, taken from the European Commission's document "European Economy". Information on number of households relates to 1991, the latest available, and is taken from the Eurostat yearbook 1997.

Street Children

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will extend the Millennium Gift Aid scheme to all donations towards street children projects in whatever country those children live. [96842]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The Millennium Gift Aid scheme was introduced in 1998 specifically to provide tax relief for donations to UK charities for educational and anti-poverty projects in the world's poorest countries. In April 1999, the scheme was extended to help refugees from Kosovo, but the Government has no plans to extend the scheme further. Some of the street children will be in countries eligible for MGA relief. UK charities working in other countries can benefit from other tax reliefs available for charitable giving, such as the Gift Aid scheme.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will add an additional entry to Table 5.5 of the Government Actuary's report National Insurance Fund Long Term Financial Estimates (Cm 4446) giving the surplus to the National Insurance Fund for each of the years there listed if Class 1 and all other contribution rates are held constant. [96243]

Dawn Primarolo: Reliable estimates could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Russia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the international community have provided overall to Russia for economic assistance over the past five years; what assessment he has made of the proportion misappropriated or not used for the purpose for which it was intended; and if he will make a statement. [94806]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since the beginning of 1995, the international community has provided the following loan finance (net of repayments over the period) through the International Financial Institutions (IFIs): £8.8 billion through the IMF, £4.0 billion through the World Bank, and £728 million through the EBRD; the IFIs have also provided technical assistance. In August, the Paris Club rescheduled $8.1 billion of Russia's Soviet-era debts. The EU has also provided technical assistance to Russia through its TACIS programme, and food aid.

The UK has made no direct loans to Russia. Since the beginning of 1995, the UK has made £592 million of export credit guarantees available to British firms doing business with Russia, on which Russia is current with repayments. The UK has made technical assistance and humanitarian aid available to Russia. Other countries have also provided bilateral assistance.

There is no evidence that any IMF or World Bank funds have been misappropriated. An investigation by PricewaterhouseCoopers discovered that an overseas subsidiary of the Central Bank of Russia (CBR) had used some of its foreign reserves to guarantee loans to commercial banks and buy Russian Government debt in breach of IMF rules and without the IMF's knowledge. Given this misuse of IMF resources, and the seriousness

of the allegations of misappropriation of IMF and World Bank funds, G7 Finance Ministers' Statement of 25 September said:

"... we emphasised the critical need for intensified efforts to combat corruption in Russia and money laundering and the importance of adequate safeguards to ensure that funds provided by the international financial institutions are used for their intended purpose ... IMF financing will be disbursed into an SDR account for the purpose of repaying Russia's obligations to the Fund. Furthermore, we agreed that the CBR, prior to disbursement of the next tranche of the SBA, should take steps identified by the IMF to improve internal controls and to initiate quarterly audits of CBR reserve management ... In the case of the World Bank, we welcomed the new safeguards, involving greater control and auditing of World Bank funds, introduced in June, and called on the World Bank to work with Russia on additional safeguards ..."

There is no evidence the EBRD funds were used for a purpose other than that intended at the time of disbursement. A portfolio review conducted by the EBRD, and further investigations carried out by its External Auditor, have satisfied the Bank that disbursements were applied as intended. One case of contract failure involving UK export credit guarantees is being investigated, on which I cannot comment at this stage.

As regards EU assistance, on 16 September, Neil Kinnock made a Commission statement on Russia:

"... Community assistance is, as this House will know, primarily delivered through the TACIS programme which is centraliy managed from Brussels. The funds concerned are predominantly used to pay EU firms to provide technical expertise and advice for Russia. Only a very small proportion of the funds therefore goes to Russia ... the Community food supply programme for Russia, that was launched earlier this year, is subject to very close monitoring which involves, amongst other things, checks on the use of the funds generated from the sale of relevant food products on local markets. Moreover, Russia does not currently receive Community loans, and the lending mandate of the European Investment Bank for countries outside the EU does not extend to Russia ..."

IR35

Ms Ward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made on the implementation of IR35; and what recent meetings he has had with business on the issue. [94883]

Dawn Primarolo: As the Minister in the lead on this measure, I have spoken with a number of people during the course of the consultation period and have received many written representations. Most representative bodies agreed that the Government was right to tackle the problem of avoidance of tax and National Insurance Contributions (NICs) by using personal service companies.

In the light of feedback received, we have modified some of the details of the mechanism set out in the Inland Revenue's original information pack. Revised proposals were published on 23 September in the Inland Revenue Press Release, "Personal Services Provided through Intermediaries—Preventing Avoidance, Preserving Flexibility".

Tax

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of sending every income tax-payer a statement of what the Government takes in tax and what it spends with their annual notice of coding. [96181]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost would depend on the nature of the statement and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Colman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will require the Financial Services Authority as the new competent authority for listing to ensure that questions of environmental risk are in future contained in all listing particulars as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment. [96896]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The London Stock Exchange, as Competent Authority, has in the last two years reviewed the statutory requirements to report provisions and disclose contingent liabilities and the accounting rules for disclosure of environmental risks. These do require companies to address, among other things, their environmental liabilities. But, in the absence of clear, recognised disclosure standards, it has not been considered appropriate to introduce a listing rule specifically covering environmental risks. The Financial Services Authority may wish to consider the position afresh when it becomes the Competent Authority, but this will be for the Financial Services Authority to decide.

Construction Workers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the tax changes which relate to the status of self-employed workers in the construction industry; and if he will make a statement. [96316]

Dawn Primarolo: The tax changes brought in by the new Construction Industry Scheme do not affect whether a person is employed or self-employed within the industry. Both the old and the new scheme work in a broadly similar way. Where a contractor makes payments relating to construction operations to a self-employed worker, they must operate the scheme. This means that they must make deductions on account of tax and NICs when making payments to subcontractors who do not qualify under the rules to be paid gross. The changes to the scheme are to control tax evasion.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 3 November 1999

NORTHERN IRELAND

Railways

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the level of public investment in each of the past five years in new rolling stock for the railway systems; and if he will make a statement on the future of the Northern Ireland Railway Network. [94837]

Mr. George Howarth: The level of investment in new rolling stock in each of the past five years is detailed in the table (the information is provided on a financial year basis).

Year	*£*
1994–95	5,279,774.36
1996–96	4,468,495.88
1996–97	5,700,559.34
1997–98	1,529,794.75
1998–99	173,394.36

Seventy-five per cent. of the investment was met from European Structural Funds.

Government are conscious of the need to invest in public transport infrastructure and rail rolling stock. The Northern Ireland Transport Policy Statement, 'Moving Forward', confirmed the need for further investment in the railways and highlighted that the possible use of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to secure investment in provision of public transport services would be explored. To that end, and given the capital costs involved, the Government are currently considering the possible use of PPPs for the replacement of rolling stock and rail infrastructure.

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if an action plan for increasing the representation of women in public life has been *(a)* prepared by his Department and *(b)* published since November 1998. [94841]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *682*.

Housing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans his Department has to renovate the Housing Executive dwellings at Braeside Gardens, Killybagh, County Down. [94836]

Mr. George Howarth: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I am advised by its Chief Executive that Braeside Gardens forms part of a scheme for multi element improvements, currently planned to commence in May 2000.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each of the last 10 years the number of dwellings erected in each council area in Northern Ireland by *(a)* the private sector, *(b)* the Housing Executive and *(c)* housing associations. [94832]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 21 October 1999]:* The information requested is as follows. Annexes A-C list, for each of the years 1989–1998, the number of new dwellings started in each district council area in Northern Ireland by the private sector (Annex A), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (Annex B) and housing associations (Annex C). In addition, Annex D lists, for the same period, the total number of new dwellings started in each district area.

Annex A: Private sector new dwelling starts by district council area 1989–98

District council area	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*Total*
Antrim	176	154	188	230	274	271	238	246	341	196	2,314
Ards	411	284	273	293	436	509	429	499	443	575	4,152
Armagh	208	172	207	180	235	260	314	265	390	385	2,616
Ballymena	248	219	250	226	326	276	297	303	337	266	2,748
Ballymoney	96	96	89	113	135	117	178	196	316	194	1,530
Banbridge	219	154	202	195	274	297	304	372	359	478	2,854
Belfast	476	403	95	488	172	80	158	68	500	350	2,790
Carrickfergus	348	295	258	252	302	286	237	232	300	199	2,708
Castlereagh	158	352	408	412	390	430	447	486	210	148	3,441
Coleraine	271	361	342	388	458	496	479	468	531	512	4,306
Cookstown	132	99	88	99	130	196	161	131	110	145	1,291
Craigavon	400	313	250	304	427	435	380	467	588	511	4,075
Derry	341	235	260	321	492	536	620	520	343	374	4,042
Down	351	283	245	226	259	307	349	375	451	412	3,258
Dungannon	127	56	103	85	50	85	182	332	385	350	1,755
Fermanagh	223	230	266	207	316	328	343	396	314	535	3,158
Larne	160	126	101	127	106	200	251	170	194	153	1,588
Limavady	99	112	115	128	181	214	162	196	190	246	1,643
Lisburn	594	408	464	451	494	559	601	498	466	384	4,919
Magherafelt	141	116	111	151	159	224	237	295	335	271	2,040
Moyle	43	77	53	51	67	102	102	132	243	165	1,053
Newry and Mourne	426	306	451	448	574	510	503	563	530	681	4,992
Newtownabbey	382	379	278	363	376	377	372	417	433	453	3,830

Annex A: Private sector new dwelling starts by district council area 1989–98

District council area	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Total
North Down	546	241	209	201	209	235	214	274	258	259	2,646
Omagh	117	180	168	127	142	136	209	142	325	417	1,963
Strabane	70	53	57	133	86	205	208	207	223	210	1,452
Total	6,763	5,704	5,531	6,199	7,070	7,689	7,975	8,250	9,115	8,869	73,165

Source:
District council building control officers

Annex B: NIHE dwelling starts by district council area 1989–98

District council area	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Total
Antrim	0	0	25	0	26	0	2	4	0	0	57
Ards	4	141	110	37	53	85	64	88	38	0	620
Armagh	4	27	28	4	0	18	30	0	19	15	145
Ballymena	17	2	9	0	57	10	0	0	56	0	161
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	31	0	43
Banbridge	0	32	8	0	22	20	0	3	10	14	109
Belfast	588	426	318	309	148	301	251	343	237	112	3,031
Carrickfergus	53	7	0	0	0	7	31	0	34	0	132
Castlereagh	15	17	10	8	30	0	0	5	0	0	85
Coleraine	16	32	6	0	32	12	0	0	0	0	98
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	6	8
Craigavon	8	14	55	46	37	37	42	42	22	14	317
Derry	99	115	113	2	327	136	121	53	45	22	1,033
Down	3	2	37	40	35	53	40	52	69	0	331
Dungannon	0	12	0	4	4	10	62	13	21	0	126
Fermanagh	5	29	12	53	71	6	28	22	35	7	268
Larne	16	7	0	0	53	0	16	0	5	0	97
Limavady	0	18	0	0	13	19	2	0	0	0	52
Lisburn	36	17	165	79	21	138	126	82	25	23	712
Magherafelt	0	41	0	0	62	11	44	12	0	0	170
Moyle	12	6	4	0	27	8	27	0	7	6	97
Newry and Mourne	30	54	28	41	36	52	34	123	74	0	472
Newtownabbey	16	0	0	0	0	48	1	6	14	34	119
North Down	0	0	36	56	24	0	14	101	6	2	239
Omagh	5	50	11	33	8	10	37	31	6	3	194
Strabane	0	30	26	6	46	78	20	35	63	3	287
Total	927	1,089	999	718	1,132	1,071	994	1,015	817	261	8,993

Source:
NIHE

Annex C: Housing association new dwelling starts by district council area 1989–98

District council area	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Total
Antrim	0	1	1	37	0	0	0	0	0	13	52
Ards	0	36	2	25	53	51	114	0	0	16	297
Armagh	7	16	0	23	0	54	0	0	6	110	216
Ballymena	1	0	8	0	56	95	27	38	14	20	259
Ballymoney	0	0	32	0	0	0	0	40	22	0	94
Banbridge	0	32	0	0	0	0	0	19	21	0	72
Belfast	198	456	377	334	130	174	139	259	298	357	2,722
Carrickfergus	2	8	0	0	0	48	21	17	19	46	161
Castlereagh	41	4	0	0	40	0	0	2	22	37	148
Coleraine	53	0	41	22	11	1	13	13	62	16	232
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	1	0	12	23
Craigavon	31	6	7	0	15	25	53	29	7	29	202
Derry	42	116	48	52	0	84	274	167	176	209	1,168
Down	0	0	2	26	33	0	0	0	44	75	180
Dungannon	0	0	25	0	25	31	0	74	35	8	198
Fermanagh	26	0	26	23	0	43	18	13	6	44	199
Larne	0	0	44	0	0	26	22	32	17	0	141
Limavady	0	0	0	39	0	0	16	28	32	41	156
Lisburn	0	0	79	67	20	100	0	4	44	87	401
Magherafelt	0	0	0	34	0	0	0	3	13	16	66
Moyle	0	0	8	0	0	30	0	0	24	20	82
Newry and Mourne	25	12	24	0	28	6	39	51	72	42	299
Newtownabbey	2	48	12	35	77	38	12	10	75	17	326
North Down	70	5	24	1	0	111	0	0	63	12	286
Omagh	0	0	0	0	1	10	46	11	6	91	165
Strabane	0	24	31	0	0	0	6	10	16	11	98
Total	498	764	791	718	489	927	810	821	1,094	1,329	8,241

Source:
DOE (NI)

Annex D: Total new dwelling starts by district council area 1989–98

District council area	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Total
Antrim	176	155	214	267	300	271	240	250	341	209	2,423
Ards	415	461	385	355	542	645	607	587	481	591	5,069
Armagh	219	215	235	207	235	332	344	265	415	510	2,977
Ballymena	266	221	267	226	439	381	324	341	407	286	3,158
Ballymoney	96	96	121	113	135	129	178	236	369	194	1,667
Banbridge	219	218	210	195	296	317	304	394	390	492	3,035
Belfast	1,262	1,285	788	1,131	450	555	548	670	1,035	819	8,643
Carrickfergus	403	310	258	252	302	341	289	249	353	245	3,002
Castlereagh	214	373	418	420	480	430	447	493	232	185	3,672
Coleraine	340	393	389	410	501	509	492	481	593	528	4,636
Cookstown	132	99	88	99	130	196	173	132	110	163	1,322
Craigavon	439	333	312	350	479	497	475	538	617	554	4,594
Derry	482	466	421	375	819	756	1,015	740	564	605	6,243
Down	354	285	284	292	327	360	389	427	564	487	3,769
Dungannon	127	68	128	89	79	126	244	419	441	358	2,079
Fermanagh	254	259	304	283	387	377	389	431	355	586	3,625
Larne	176	133	145	127	159	226	289	202	216	153	1,826
Limavady	99	130	115	167	194	233	180	224	222	287	1,851
Lisburn	630	425	708	597	535	797	727	584	535	494	6,032
Magherafelt	141	157	111	185	221	235	281	310	348	267	2,276
Moyle	55	83	65	51	94	158	129	132	274	191	1,232
Newry and Mourne	481	372	503	489	638	568	576	737	676	723	5,763
Newtownabbey	400	427	290	398	453	463	385	433	522	504	4,275
North Down	616	246	269	258	233	346	228	375	327	273	3,171
Omagh	122	230	179	160	151	156	292	184	337	511	2,322
Strabane	70	87	114	139	132	283	234	252	302	224	1,837
Other[1]	13	0	137	69	0	0	0	0	0	0	219
Total	8,201	7,597	7,458	7,704	8,691	9,687	9,779	10,086	11,026	10,459	90,618

[1] Includes dwellings commenced by Ministry of Defence etc. which cannot be broken down by district council area.

Sources:

District council building control offices, NIHE and DOE (NI)

Pig Industry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new measures of support for the pig industry were introduced during the past six months; what assessment he has made of the (i) current situation and (ii) situation one year ago in the pig industry; and if he will make a statement. [94824]

Mr. George Howarth: No new measures of support for the pig industry have been introduced during the past six months.

Government are unable to directly aid the sector as such assistance would be in breach of European Union State Aid rules.

Government are very aware of the crisis in the pig industry. Although returns to pig producers have increased over the past year they still do not cover production costs.

Government will continue to liaise closely with the industry and the EU Commission to seek solutions, compatible with EU State Aid rules, to the current difficulties. In the interim every effort will be made to ensure that United Kingdom retailers and consumers fully appreciate the excellent quality and high welfare standards of British produced pigs.

BSE

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the incidence of BSE in cattle in each of the past five years; how many cases of BSE have been identified in 1999 to date; and if he will make a statement on the impact of Northern Ireland beef products into the European Union. [94838]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested in relation to the incidence of BSE in Northern Ireland is provided in the table.

Apart from a relatively small amount of beef exported under the Export Certified Herds Scheme in the second half of 1998 and the first half of 1999 there have been no exports of Northern Ireland beef since the export ban on UK beef was imposed in March 1996.

BSE confirmed cases in Northern Ireland 1994–99

	Total cases
1994	363
1995	170
1996	81
1997	28
1998	18
1999	[1]5

[1] Figure as at 21 October 1999

EU Agriculture Council

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Minister responsible for Northern Ireland agriculture last attended a meeting of the European Union Council of Ministers in Brussels;

and if he will make a statement on the contribution of his Department to European Union agriculture policy decisions. [95075]

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friend Lord Dubs, the Minister responsible for agriculture in Northern Ireland, last attended the EU Council of Agriculture Ministers on 5 March 1999 during the final stages of the negotiations on the Agenda 2000 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). He also attended the Fisheries Council meeting on 17–18 December 1998.

The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland plays a full and active role in the establishment of the UK's position on relevant EU agricultural policy issues. Decisions on EU agricultural policy are, of course, beyond the remit of a single member state and reflect the collective position of all fifteen members of the European Union. Nevertheless, recent examples of the successful representation of Northern Ireland interests in the EU Council of Ministers include the introduction of the Export Certified Herd Scheme in June 1998 and the special allocation of additional milk quota to Northern Ireland as part of the Agenda 2000 agreement on CAP reform, neither of which was replicated in other parts of the UK.

The issues arising at each Agriculture Council meeting are discussed in advance by senior officials of the four UK Agriculture Departments. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food also meets his agriculture Ministerial colleagues before each Council meeting.

Gay Men

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much of the money ring-fenced by the Northern Ireland health boards to provide services for gay men has been spent on such services since the institution of such ring-fencing; what the figures are for each health board; and if he will make a statement. [96616]

Mr. George Howarth: Health and Social Services Boards' allocations are not ring-fenced for the provision of services for gay men. It is for individual boards to use their funds to respond to the health needs of their local populations, including gay men.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the President of the Council what representations she has received about the safety of air travel on 1 January 2000. [96319]

Mrs. Beckett: I have received no representations about the safety of air travel on 1 January 2000.

As part of Action 2000's work on key sectors of the national infrastructure, the latest independent assessments show that there is no risk of material disruption to national air traffic control systems, airports and airlines as a result of the Millennium Bug.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Corporate Manslaughter

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the law of corporate manslaughter as it affects incidents in the transport sector. [95983]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* I have been asked to reply.

We are considering what action to take in the light of the Law Commission's report on Involuntary Manslaughter which includes proposals in relation to corporate manslaughter. We will make our proposals known shortly.

Parish Councils

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans for the system of parish councils. [96465]

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for *(a)* reducing and *(b)* increasing the powers, responsibilities or statutory roles of parish councils; and if he will make a statement. [96417]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 25 October 1999, *Official Report,* column 677.

Rail Safety

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on rail safety following the Paddington rail disaster; and if he will make a statement on the safety measures to be taken and who will be responsible for implementing them. [96545]

Mr. Hill: Ministers have received a large number of representations from many quarters. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced measures being taken to the House on 19 October 1999, *Official Report,* columns 266–69. Further recommendations will no doubt emerge from the Public Inquiry into this disaster.

In addition, on 25 October my right hon. Friend agreed an immediate plan with rail industry leaders covering further measures to improve safety, namely: consistent standards of driver training; a nationwide independent confidential reporting system; accelerating implementation of the Train Protection Warning System (TPWS) and development of Automatic Train Protection (ATP); immediate investigation of all signals passed at danger (SPADs) to a common standard; urgent action on the 22 Actions required by the HSE for reducing SPADs; and establishing a consistent approach to safety management.

Millennium Compliance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress towards preparing airlines for millennium compliance by 1 January 2000. [96317]

Mr. Mullin: UK airlines are well advanced in their preparations for millennium compliance. All necessary remedial work has been carried out, underpinned by robust contingency plans for the continued safe operation of services over the millennium period. The Civil Aviation Authority has completed assessments of both safety and business continuity systems and has stated that the UK industry is ready for the millennium.

As regards foreign airlines, work is continuing to gather comprehensive information. The emerging global view from the major international aviation organisations is that the aviation industry is on track for compliance. Foreign aircraft are granted a permit to operate in this country only if they comply with international safety standards, which, over the millennium, includes assurance that they carry no Y2k safety related risks.

Water Industry

Mr. Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which organisations applied to be designated to recognise persons as approved contractors under clause 1(2)(b) of the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999, what are the criteria for the award and removal of such designation and recognition; and when and with whom he will be consulting on the matter. [96752]

Mr. Mullin: The Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 created, for the first time, the legal concept of an approved contractor in relation to installing water fittings. My officials have discussed the terms of approved contractor schemes with a number of professional and training bodies. The Water Regulations Advisory Committee advise Ministers on these issues. Schemes should be compatible with those to be introduced by the water undertakers under Regulation 1(2)(a). The Water Regulations Advisory Scheme will be consulted accordingly. The Institute of Plumbing have applied to be designated to recognise persons as approved contractors, and officials have held an exploratory discussion with them.

Aarhus Convention

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the procedural changes introduced by his Department and its agencies following the Government's signing of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Environmental Information. [96719]

Mr. Mullin: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 21 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns *519–20*.

The Government continue to take account of the Convention. For example, all Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations and the forthcoming Pollution Prevention Control Regulations are being drafted to implement parts of the Convention.

Air Traffic

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the annual growth in air traffic to 2010. [97249]

Mr. Mullin: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1997 Air Traffic Forecasts forecast international terminal passengers under three growth scenarios; low growth, mid-point growth and high growth. The full results are in the table. New forecasts are expected to be complete by early 2000.

Millions of passengers

	2000	*2005*	*2010*	*2015*
Short Haul				
Low	66.3	73	84.8	99.3
Mid-P	73.9	87.8	107.9	131.1
High	81.6	102.6	130.9	163.0
Long Haul				
Low	36.5	43.9	52.5	63.6
Mid-P	39.3	51.7	66.5	85.4
High	42.2	59.5	80.6	107.3
Total				
Low	102.8	116.9	137.2	162.8
Mid-P	113.3	139.5	174.3	216.5
High	123.7	162.1	211.4	270.2

Greater London Authority Bill

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will provide explanatory notes for the new Clauses and new Schedules added to the Greater London Authority Bill since 5 May. [97111]

Mr. Hill: I am today placing explanatory notes in the Library of the House.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Television Licensing

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to require the TV licensing authorities to run television licences from the precise date when bought rather than the end of the previous month; and if he will make a statement. [96985]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* None. As explained in my reply of 27 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns *861–62*, the BBC has statutory responsibility for the administration of the television licensing system and TV Licensing carries out the day to day administration as agent for the Corporation.

BBC

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will ensure that his Department makes every effort to hear representations from employees of the companies and other interested parties about the proposed sale of BBC Resources and BBC Worldwide; and if he will make a statement. [97037]

Janet Anderson: We have received a number of representations from individuals and organisations on the independent review panel's recommendations about BBC Resources and BBC Worldwide. The recommendations are contained in the panel's report on the future funding of the BBC, published for public consultation on

5 August. The closing date for the public consultation was 1 November. We will consider all the panel's recommendations in the light of responses received and hope to reach final decisions around the end of the year.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures are being taken to ensure that under-16s do not enter the Dome alone. [95191]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) aims to ensure that all visitors to the Dome enjoy a safe and exemplary day. The company does not wish to encourage unaccompanied children to travel alone to visit the Dome. The company is also concerned about the general safety of young children on the site. Consequently NMEC will not knowingly sell tickets to, nor generally admit, children under 16 years of age who are not accompanied by an adult. All Millennium Experience ticketing material makes it clear that NMEC reserves the right to refuse entry in these circumstances. NMEC's policy in this respect is similar to that adopted by most major visitor attractions in the UK.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Anti-Terrorist Squad of the Metropolitan Police in relation to security at the Millennium Dome. [95122]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company has regular discussions with the Metropolitan Police about all aspects of security. By definition, it would not be helpful to reveal the detail of those discussions or the security arrangements implemented as a result. I am satisfied that those arrangements are robust and comprehensive

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many book titles will be sold in the Dome; and how many of these have been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* sponsored by the NMEC. [94691]

Janet Anderson: NMEC is not commissioning or sponsoring books. About 200 general titles will be available at the Dome which relate to the Millennium Experience and Dome content. The company is publishing one book—a guide to the Dome which will be a keepsake of the day for visitors and which will be only available at the Dome. The company has licensed a number of publishers (Booth Clibborn Editions, Dennis Publishing Limited, Dorling Kindersley Limited, including Funfax, Harper Collins Publishers, and Manning Partnership Limited) to produce a portfolio of books and is working with the publishers to develop them. Thirty one books are covered by these licence arrangements and the portfolio caters for all ages and interests. All thirty one will be available at the Dome and on the high street.

Millennium (Sponsorship)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which sponsors of the Millennium Experience have signed sponsorship contracts with the New Millennium Experience Company. [95147]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* Contractual arrangements have been completed with British Aerospace, British Airports Authority, BT, Camelot, Corporation of London, Ford, GEC, Kodak, Marks and Spencer, McDonald's, Tesco, Wall's and Woolwich. The remaining contractual arrangements are all close to completion. All announced sponsors are irrevocably committed at Board level.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Publications

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list his Department's spending on official publications since May 1997. [93693]

Mr. Hain: The spending on official publications produced by the publications Section of Information Department from May 1997 was:

Year	£
May 1997 to March 1998	2,062,363.30
April 1998 to March 1999	1,487,125.70
April 1999 to September 1999	641,007.01

The answer totals the cost of Publications for use overseas (£4,190,495) and the two departmental reports produced since May 1997 (£28,871).

Death Penalty (United States)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times Ministers and officials of his Department have held meetings with members and officials of the United States Government to discuss the death penalty since 1 November 1998; and if he will list the *(a)* dates, *(b)* locations and *(c)* names of the US members and officials, and their respective departments, at each meeting. [93958]

Mr. Robin Cook: Foreign Office Ministers and officials discuss frequently the death penalty with their US counterparts. At Ministerial level, Baroness Symons most recently raised HMG's opposition to the use of the death penalty in the United States with Harold Koh, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, US State Department, during her visit to Washington on 25 March.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *375*, concerning KFOR investigations and Hashim Thaci, when he will reply to the hon. Member for Halifax. [96022]

Mr. Vaz: A letter in answer to my hon. Friend's original question was sent on 26 October and placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

UN Security Council Resolution 1,244, which established the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the NATO-led Kosovo force (KFOR), gives UNMIK responsibility for maintaining civil law and order in Kosovo. This includes investigations into alleged crimes.

including inquiries into crimes alleged to have taken place in Kosovo before UNMIK and KFOR's deployment in June 1999.

Questions about specific allegations are therefore for the UNMIK authorities. Anyone seeking to obtain or provide information about alleged crimes should contact UNMIK directly. In the case of possible war crimes, decisions would be made in consultation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Von Weizsäcker-Dehaene-Simon Group

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations took place with Her Majesty's Government on behalf of the Von Weizsäcker-Dehaene-Simon Group concerning the topics they covered in their recently published documents on Enlargement and Institutional Affairs of the European Union. [96505]

Mr. Vaz: Members of the Group were briefed on the UK's approach to institutional reform. However they sat on the Group in a personal capacity. Consequently the report represents their own views, not those of any national Government.

Burma

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs further to his answer of 21 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *633*, what consular services have been provided to James Mawdsley and his family. [96499]

Mr. Hain: Embassy staff have visited James twice since his arrest and taken him soap, vitamins, food, letters, books and other items. The Embassy and our Consular Division in London have been in close contact with James's family. The Embassy has made numerous requests for permission for his mother to visit him. The Burmese have now agreed to this.

Caucasus

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support proposals for a special conference on security in the Caucasus region under the auspices of the OSCE. [96428]

Mr. Vaz: We are committed to supporting existing efforts to promote security in the Caucasus, including the involvement of the OSCE in helping to resolve the conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia and, in support of the UN, over Abkhazia. We expect these issues to be discussed at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul, as well as the situation in the North Caucasus, including Chechnya. We believe there may be a role for the OSCE in seeking a resolution to the conflict in Chechnya. But we are not aware of proposals for a special OSCE conference on security in the Caucasus more broadly.

Chechnya

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the security situation in Chechnya and the Caucasus will be discussed at the OSCE meeting of Heads of State at Istanbul, on 18 to 19 November. [96427]

Mr. Vaz: We remain deeply concerned about the situation in Chechnya, and reported civilian casualties. We expect the conflicts in Chechnya and the South Caucasus to be discussed at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul, and hope that the discussion will contribute to security in the region.

Entry Clearance (Subcontinent)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long a person applying for entry clearance for settlement in June, July and August can be expected to have to wait for an interview in each queue at each post in the Indian subcontinent. [96617]

Mr. Vaz: The statistics requested are as follows:

Waiting times in weeks on last day of month

Post	*Queue*	*June*	*July*	*August*
India				
Bombay	Q1	0	0	0
	Q2	6	5	4
	Q3	6	5	5
	[1]Q4	6	5	5
Calcutta	[2]—	0.4	1	0
Sri Lanka				
Colombo	[2]—	12	11	9

[1] Re-applicants
[2] Calcutta, Colombo, Karachi and Madras do not operate separate queues

The extended queues in Islamabad and Dhaka in particular are a consequence of seasonal pressures. We have deployed additional staff to Islamabad to deal with increased applications for short term visits.

United Nations

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the UK Government's financial contribution to the United Nations' *(a)* staffing and *(b)* volunteer programmes for each of the past 10 years. [96652]

Mr. Hain: Staffing costs account for approximately 70 per cent. of UN Regular Budget expenditure. The UK's mandatory contributions for 1990–99 to the Regular Budget are listed in the table. UK contributions to other UN funds and programmes, specialised agencies and peacekeeping and humanitarian operations also cover staffing costs.

The UN Volunteers Programme (UNV) is administered by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and will account for around 5 per cent. of UNDP's budget for the period 2000–01. The UK's voluntary contributions to the UNDP core budget for 1990–99 are also listed in the table. Since 1991 the UK has also provided £315,848 directly to UNV.

UK Mandatory Contribution to UN Regular Budget

	US$000
1990	38,436
1991	44,776
1992	49,438
1993	51,230
1994	51,068

UK Mandatory Contribution to UN Regular Budget

	US$000
1995	57,589
1996	58,106
1997	56,662
1998	53,890
1999	52,890

UK Voluntary Core Contributions to UNDP

UK financial years	*£000*
1990–91	27,017
1991–92	28,890
1992–93	30,104
1993–94	31,235
1994–95	28,212
1995–96	26,031
1996–97	29,000
1997–98	22,602
1998–99	30,850
1999–2000	35,817

Ibiza

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens were arrested in Ibiza for *(a)* possession of and *(b)* dealing in drugs in each of the last five years. [96626]

Mr. Hain: We do not record separately details of British nationals arrested in Ibiza for possession of drugs and those arrested for dealing in drugs.

The numbers of British nationals detained in Ibiza over the past five years for drugs related offences are:

	Number
1995	68
1996	18
1997	57
1998	30
1999	46

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens were arrested and for what categories of offences during 1999 in Ibiza. [96625]

Mr. Hain: On 28 October 1999, our records showed that 162 British nationals had been detained in Ibiza this year. The offences range from violence to drink driving, drugs, damages, fraud and theft.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens were involved in drug-related medical emergencies in Ibiza during each of the past five years. [96624]

Mr. Hain: We do not record details of British nationals involved in drug-related medical emergencies in Ibiza. Spanish hospitals are not required to inform consulates when British Citizens are admitted for treatment.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens travelled to Ibiza during 1999. [96623]

Mr. Vaz: As at 30 September 1999 approximately 651,834 British nationals are believed to have visited Ibiza during the year.

Nuclear Disarmament

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government will be supporting the resolution at the UN General Assembly's First Committee on Disarmament and International Security entitled, "Towards a Nuclear Weapon Free World: the Need for a New Agenda"; and if he will make a statement. [96433]

Mr. Vaz: As at last year, the New Agenda resolution contains many proposals we strongly support, but also a number we do not, including measures we examined in detail in the Strategic Defence Review, and concluded were incompatible with the maintenance of our minimum nuclear deterrent. We will therefore vote against the resolution as a whole.

Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Russian counterpart about that country's level of compliance with its obligations under the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty; and if he will make a statement. [96925]

Mr. Vaz: We attach great importance to compliance with the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty by all States party to it. Russian implementation of the Treaty is of major concern, and we have been pressing and will continue to press the Russians for action in areas where they are non-compliant. We have been taking this action both bilaterally and in multilateral forums, including in contacts in Vienna.

Iran

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when Her Majesty's Government last made representations on behalf of the human rights of the Baha'is faith people of Iran; and if he will make a statement; [96980]

(2) when the Permanent Representative of the United Nations last spoke on behalf of the human rights of the Baha'is faith people of Iran; and if he will make a statement; [96983]

(3) when the Permanent Representative of the European Union last spoke on behalf of the human rights of the Baha'is people of Iran; and if he will make a statement. [96982]

Mr. Hain: Iran is aware of our serious concern about the Baha'is. Persecution of individuals on religious grounds is totally unacceptable. We and our EU partners regularly press the Iranian authorities on this issue. I personally raised our concerns during a call by the Iranian Ambassador on 4 August. The EU regularly press the Iranian authorities over the plight of the Baha'is, most recently the Germany Presidency did so at the latest EU/Iran talks in May. I assured Barnabas Leith, Secretary General of the UK Baha'is Community of our continue support when we met on 18 October.

The 1998 report on Human Rights in Iran by UN Special Representative Maurice Copithorne was particularly critical of Iranian treatment of the Baha'is. We expect his 1999 report to contain similarly critical language. We and our EU partners sponsored a Resolution on Human Rights in Iran at the 1999 UN Commission on Human Rights; this was adopted on 23 April and reaffirmed international concern about the Baha'is plight. We expect that a further resolution, also sponsored by the EU and containing equally firm language on the Baha'is, will be adopted at the current session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97046]

Mr. Hain: Depreciations will be provided at rates calculated to write off the valuation of fixed assets by equal instalments over their estimated useful lives. Freehold land is not depreciated. This method is in accordance with HM Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual. The requirements in the Manual regarding methods of depreciation will be underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15 "Tangible Fixed Assets", issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

Strategic Export Control

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government intend to publish the second Annual Report on strategic export control. [97215]

Mr. Hain: We have issued the second Annual Report today. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It has now been entered on the FCO website (www.fco.gov.uk).

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in inhibiting the use of diamond sales for funding the war in Angola. [96084]

Mr. Hain: UN Security Council resolution 1173 of 12 June 1998 imposed a ban on the direct or indirect import from Angola of all diamonds not controlled through the Angolan Government's Certificate of Origin of Origin regime. The aim was to cut off diamond revenues to UNITA, and so reduce their ability to fund continued fighting. The UK implements the resolution through the Angola (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1998.

UN Security Council resolution 1237 of 7 May 1999 established a panel of experts to investigate alleged violations of the sanctions against UNITA, in support of the work of the UN Angola Sanctions Committee. Panel members are paying a series of visits to the region, and will report on how sanctions in relation to UNITA diamonds can be implemented and enforced more effectively.

We welcomed the announcement by De Beers on 5 October that they will no longer purchase any Angolan diamonds, and will urge their clients to adopt a similar policy.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the UN Sanctions Committee for Angola has identified *(a)* the source of illegal arms importation in Angola and *(b)* those countries and corporations which have broken trade embargoes with Angola; and if he will make a statement. [96085]

Mr. Hain: The UN Angola Sanctions Committee has been looking at ways to tighten implementation of UN sanctions against UNITA, but has not yet commented publicly on these matters. UN Security Council resolution 1237 of 7 May 1999 established, in support of the work of the Committee, a panel of experts with a mandate to investigate alleged violations of the sanctions against UNITA, including the arms embargo and restrictions on trade. Panel members will be paying a number of visits to the region. Based on their findings, they will issue conclusions and recommendations on how to improve implementation of the sanctions regime. The UK Government fully support the work of the UN Angola Sanctions Committee.

International Criminal Court Statute

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made by him in seeking ratification by the UK of the International Criminal Court Statute. [96086]

Mr. Hain: Detailed work to prepare legislation enabling the UK to ratify the International Criminal Court Statute is going forward and will be introduced as soon as the Parliamentary timetable permits. We remain strongly committed to the Court and intend to be among the first sixty states to ratify.

Chinese President (State Visit)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in any of the bilateral meetings which took place between representatives of his Department and of the Metropolitan police prior to the visit of President Jiang Zemin, the police were made aware that demonstrations in support of Tibet would cause embarrassment to the Government. [97117]

Mr. Battle: We discussed demonstrations in the terms set out in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *993*. At no time did we say that demonstrations in support of Tibet would cause embarrassment to the Government.

EU Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the time limit for the Quality of Legislation EC Working Group; and what progress it has made. [95304]

Marjorie Mowlam: I have been asked to reply.

The Group met for the last time on 3 December 1998. After adoption by the three Institutions involved, (European Parliament, Commission and Council), the

Inter-Institutional Agreement on the quality of drafting of Community legislation was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 17 March 1999. The IIA requires the Institutions to follow guidelines setting out the general principles of good quality drafting and to implement some practical measures.

The UK Government have circulated the Agreement to all Departments and published it in full in the "Guide to Better European Regulation", copies of which have been widely disseminated, including to all MPs.

I understand that good progress is being made in the Institutions on the implementation measures including:

An Inter-Institutional Group to implement the Guidelines has been established.

A practical guide is due to be published in March 2000;

in the Commission each Directorate General has appointed a legislative co-ordinator who will ensure that drafting rules and technical rules are complied with when texts are drafted;

in the Commission and Council officials responsible for legal drafting will, after training, form specialist drafting units to train officials who draft legal texts;

improvements have been made to the IT tools available to assist legal drafting in both the Council and the Commission, for example "LegisWrite", which provides models for all types of Community texts, has been recently introduced in the Commission.

HOME DEPARTMENT

IT Projects

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the network information technology projects which are being undertaken by his Department, including the date each project started, the planned date for completion, the current expected date of completion, the planned cost of the project and the current estimate of total cost; and if he will make a statement. [94770]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 21 October 1999]:* A list of those significant Information Technology (IT) projects currently being undertaken by the Home Office, where the IT value of the project is in excess of £5 million or the project is critical to the business of the Home Office has been placed in the Library.

A wide interpretation has been taken as to what is meant by network information technology projects. I have included those projects which have a significant element of business change or voice technology as well as the more traditional computing projects.

The information presented on costs and timetables reflects differences between the nature and current stage of the projects.

Prisoner Licences

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been let out on licence each year since the scheme's inception; how many have broken their licence conditions in each year; and what monitoring he is putting in place to gauge the impact of the scheme. [95536]

Mr. Boateng: The Home Detention Curfew scheme began operation on 28 January 1999. Between that time and 27 October, 12,280 offenders have been made subject to the scheme. In the same period, 567 curfewees have had their licence revoked by the Secretary of State. Breaches of non-curfew related conditions by curfewees whose original offences were committed prior to 1 January 1999 are dealt with by the courts. Information on these cases is not held centrally.

The Home Detention Curfew scheme is being monitored and evaluated by the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, who will be producing a report on the first year of the scheme's operation during the course of the year 2000.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in *(a)* January 1998, *(b)* July 1998, *(c)* January 1999 and *(d)* July 1999 were engaged (i) wholly and (ii) partly in making (x) asylum and (y) immigration decisions. [96027]

Mrs. Roche: Information is not available in the form requested. Prior to the formation of the Integrated Casework Directorate (ICD) in December 1998, asylum decisions were made by staff working in the Asylum Directorate, and immigration casework decisions by the After Entry and Appeals Directorate (AEAD) and some staff in the Immigration Service Enforcement Directorate (ISED). The total number of staff in the Asylum Directorate in January 1998 was 659 and in July 1998 was 530, and in the AEAD for the same months was 623 and 569 respectively. These totals include management and support grades. Over and above these figures, there were a number of caseworkers in the ISED making decision in deportation and illegal entry cases.

Since the creation of the ICD, casework is dealt with by multi-skilled teams which deal with both asylum and immigration casework. Figures on the breakdown of staff dealing with differing types of case are not kept centrally. The total number of staff in the ICD in January 1999 was 424 and in July 1999 was 1,452.

Despite the lack of detailed figures, it has become clear that the number of trained asylum caseworkers now in the ICD is significantly lower than was available in January and July 1998. This has been a function of declining staffing levels in anticipation of efficiencies from the new caseworking system which did not in fact materialise. We are therefore recruiting around 250 caseworkers specifically to process asylum cases and training a greater proportion of our existing caseworkers in asylum skills.

Judicial and Police Co-operation

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 June 1999, *Official Report*, column *264* on judicial and police co-operation, if he will list those measures in respect of the Treaty of the European Community which the Government intend *(a)* to adopt and *(b)* not to adopt; if they participate in consideration of measures which they do not intend to adopt; and in respect of each measure if

he will include its official reference, where and when it was discussed, and the current stage of parliamentary scrutiny to which it is subject. [96568]

Mr. Straw: Title VI of the Treaty on European Union contains provisions on police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters in which member states participate as of right. The question of adopting or not adopting individual measures does not, therefore, arise. Each measure is subject to unanimity. All Third Pillar matters which meet the criteria for scrutiny are submitted to Parliament in the usual way. The following issues are under consideration:

Draft Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters

Official reference 9636/99 (COPEN 11).

Last discussed by the Article 36 Committee on 22 October.

Deposited for Parliamentary scrutiny on 23 July. Not yet cleared.

Draft Framework Decision on counterfeiting of the euro

Official reference 9966/99 (DROIPEN 4).

Last discussed in the Working Group on Substantive Criminal Law on 19 October.

Deposited for Parliamentary scrutiny on 20 July. Not yet cleared.

Draft joint action on combating serious environmental crime

Official reference 5579/99 (CK4 10).

Last discussed in the Working Group on Substantive Criminal Law on 16 September.

Deposited for Parliamentary scrutiny on 29 January.

Cleared by the House of Lords on 3 March and by the House of Commons on 16 June.

Draft Framework Decision on combating fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment

Official reference 11217/99 (CRIMORG 135).

Not yet discussed.

Deposited for Parliamentary scrutiny on 13 October. Not yet cleared.

Draft joint action on criminal law protection against fraudulent or unfair anti-competitive conduct in the award of public contracts in the common market

Official reference 6946/99 (JUSTPEN 16).

Last discussed in the Working Group on Criminal Law/Community Law on 7 April.

Deposited for Parliamentary scrutiny on 6 April and cleared on 28 April.

Draft Decision on the Exchange of Information between Financial Intelligence Units

Official reference 9961/99 (CRIMORG 101).

Discussed by the Multi-Disciplinary Group on Organised Crime on 26 and 27 July.

Deposited for Parliamentary scrutiny on 6 August. Not yet cleared.

Draft Joint Action on Asset Sharing

Official reference 13007/98 (CRIMORG 178).

Discussed at the K4 Committee on 23 and 24 January.

Deposited for Parliamentary scrutiny on 4 March. Not yet cleared.

Council Decision authorising the Director of Europol to enter into negotiations on agreements with third states and non-European Union related bodies

Official reference 11854/2/99 (EUROPOL 43).

Discussed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council Meeting on 29 October.

Deposited for Parliamentary scrutiny on 20 October.

Cleared by the House of Lords on 26 October and by the House of Commons on 27 October.

K4 Committee

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to his answer of 8 June 1999, *Official Report*, column *259*, on the K4 Committee, if he will list the bodies involved in such consultation and publish their responses; what further consultations and discussions have *(a)* taken place and *(b)* are planned within the European Union on this matter; what measures he expects to be necessary to implement such a proposal; and on what treaty articles they would be based. [96504]

Mrs. Roche: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave evidence about the United Kingdom initiative on mutual recognition of judicial decisions in criminal matters to the House of Lords' European Communities Committee before the Tampere European Council. No detailed legislative proposals concerning mutual recognition have yet been tabled in the European Union. The European Council has, however, asked the Council and the Commission to adopt, by December 2000, a programme of measures to implement the principle of mutual recognition. Any proposals for legal instruments will be submitted to Parliament in accordance with normal procedures, and I will also ensure that United Kingdom bodies concerned in implementing the proposals are consulted. It is likely that primary legislation would be needed to implement these proposals. It is expected that the proposals would be based on Article 34 of the Treaty on European Union.

Women Medical Examiners

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police authority area, the number of women medical examiners available for examinations involving child victims of sex attacks; and if in all areas child victims or their families are able to choose to be examined by a female doctor. [96398]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Comprehensive information about numbers of female medical examiners is not held centrally. It is accepted as good practice that child victims of sexual assaults, or their families on their behalf, should be given the choice of being examined by a female doctor. Unfortunately, this cannot always be guaranteed as there are some police forces which do not have female medical examiners.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *685*, on the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, if he will list the areas in which *(a)* reparation orders, *(b)* parenting orders, *(c)* child safety orders and *(d)* action plan orders are being piloted; and if he will give the number of such orders which have been issued in each respective pilot area. [96473]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is set out in the table. It indicates the number of orders made in the pilot areas by 30 September 1999, the latest date for which this information is readily available.

Pilot area/order	Reparation order	Parenting order	Action plan order
Westminster	13	2	24
Kensington and Chelsea	13	0	20
Hammersmith and Fulham	16	0	40
Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight	471	3	261
Wolverhampton	122	14	88
Sheffield	179	0	57
Lewisham	[1]—	7	[1]—
Devon	[1]—	5	[1]—
Bedfordshire	[1]—	25	[1]—
Luton	[1]—	10	[1]—
St. Helens	[1]—	21	[1]—
Sunderland	[1]—	35	[1]—
Blackburn	15	[1]—	[1]—
Total	829	122	490

[1] Indicates that the provision is not being piloted, or was not available, in that area

In addition, one child safety order was made in the Sunderland pilot area.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *689* on asylum seekers, if asylum seekers will be deemed to be statutorily homeless. [96543]

Mrs. Roche: Asylum seekers who are destitute will be able to apply for accommodation and other essential living needs under the arrangements made under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Bill. Once those arrangements are in place, only those asylum seekers who are entitled to social security benefits will be entitled to assistance under the homelessness legislation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on plans for standardisation of the appeal system for asylum seekers whose asylum request has been rejected, following Tampere. [96572]

Mrs. Roche: I am aware of no such plans, although consideration of appeal procedures may in due course feature in work on minimum standards for the qualification of nationals of third countries as refugees in accordance with article 63 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. The United Kingdom has the choice of opting into these measures.

Schengen Agreement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those organisations he has consulted in deciding whether to join elements of the Schengen Agreement. [96550]

Mrs. Roche: In deciding which parts of the Schengen acquis to participate in and in preparing the United Kingdom's formal application for participation, the Home Office consulted colleagues within Government with relevant policy interests. We also consulted the Governments of Gibraltar, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, the police service and the Data Protection Registrar. In addition, we took note of the reports of the House of Lords European Communities Committee, including comments from a range of organisations and interests.

The Government's approach to Schengen follows our established policy of full engagement in justice and home affairs matters, where compatible with the maintenance of frontier controls. As such, our application raised no fresh issues on which wider consultation might have been required.

Civil Protection (Overseas)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance he has given to countries overseas towards their civil protection plans. [96537]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Indirect assistance has been given through co-operation with the European Commission and the member states of the European Union, and with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and its Partner countries. In addition, the Emergency Planning College has provided training to members of the civil protection services of overseas countries, on a full cost recovery basis.

Prisoners

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prisoners in United Kingdom jails by category; what is the average proportion of sentence served in each category, and what is the average annual cost of keeping a prisoner in each category. [96869]

Mr. Boateng: Female prisoners, remand prisoners and recently sentenced prisoners are not allocated to a security category. The centrally available information on the numbers of prisoners in each security category and the average proportion of sentence served by category on release of prisoners released in 1998 is given in the tables. The cost per place by type of establishment is in the Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts for April 1998 to March 1999, a copy of which is available in the Library, and is given in the tables.

Information about prisons and prisoners in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Numbers of prisoners in England and Wales in security categories A-D

Category	Number
Category A	660
Category B	7,400
Category C	26,330
Category D	[1]4,920

[1] On 30 September 1999

Note:
Females, remand prisoners and recently sentenced prisoners are not categorised.

Average proportion of sentence served by category on release for prisoners in England and Wales released during 1998

Category	Percentage
Category A	65
Category B	56
Category C	54
Category D	44

Note:
Females, remand prisoners and recently sentenced prisoners are not categorised.

Cost per place by type of establishment for prisons in England and Wales

Type of establishment	*Cost per place (£)*
Female Closed	27,966
Female Local	27,426
Female Open	16,995
Category B	21,079
Category C	17,543
Dispersals	34,383
Male Local	24,604
Male Open	14,505
Male Remand Centres	23,644
Male Closed Young Offender Institutions	18,885
Male Open Young Offender Institutions	18,650
Male Under 18s	26,113
Overall Average	22,649

Note:

Establishments are categorised in the table by their main role only. Establishments that have more than one role have been placed in the category that represents the primary or predominant function of the prison.

Staffordshire Police Authority

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total staffing levels of the Staffordshire Police Authority were for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1997–98, and *(e)* 1998–99: what the projected levels are for (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01, (iii) 2001–02 and (iv) 2002–03; and if he will give these figures broken down by front-line and other staff. [96989]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information on police officer and civilian support staff strength is collected at the end of March and September. The figures for the period requested are set out in the table.

	Total officer strength	*Total civilian strength*
31 March 1994	2,208	[1]734
31 March 1995	2,231	749
31 March 1996	2,209	754
31 March 1997	2,211	763
31 March 1998	2,292	866
31 March 1999	2,238	1,004

[1] As at 31 December 1993

The powers of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to set police establishment levels for each force were removed under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. It is for the chief officer to determine staffing requirements within the overall resources available. This year, Staffordshire Police Authority has set a budget that will allow the force to spend up to £122.2 million—an increase of £3.3 million or 2.7 per cent. over 1998–99. This increase, along with the 2 per cent. efficiency improvements that have been set, should be sufficient for the force to maintain levels of service. Future staffing levels are for the Chief Constable to determine within the overall resources available. However, the Government are making available additional resources, in a new ring-fenced Crime Fighting Fund, to enable forces to recruit 5,000 more police officers, over and above those that they had otherwise planned to recruit over the next three years. Staffordshire Police will be able to apply for a share of this funding.

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government funding Staffordshire Police Authority received in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1997–98 and *(e)* 1998–99 and will receive in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01, (iii) 2001–02 and (iv) 2002–03 in real terms; and from what other sources the Staffordshire Police Authority has received funding for the same years as above. [96988]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested in respect of years 1994–95 to 1999–2000 is set out in the table. Information for later years is not available, but the provisional police funding settlement for 2000–01 will be announced in the next few weeks.

In addition to the Government funding set out in the table, police authorities can also use income from council tax to meet their budget requirements.

	Government funding £ million [1]	*1995–96 Price Base £ million*	*Real terms increase on previous year Percentage*
1994–95[2]	52.313	n/a	—
1995–96	89.194	89.194	—
1996–97	97.044	94.016	5.4
1997–98	99.204	96.518	2.7
1998–99	98.519	96.082	-0.5
1999–2000	99.449	97.024	1.0

[1] Includes Police revenue grant, capital grant, loan charges grant paid on pre, 1990 debt, grants paid under section 48 of the Police Act 1996, grant for special constabulary, grant paid for implementation of Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, special grant towards policing costs of Birmingham Northern Relief Road, Revenue Support grant and National Non Domestic Rates, both of whom fall to the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

[2] Excludes Revenue Support Grant and National Non Domestic Rates—no separately identifiable figures for the police within total allocation paid to County Council.

The table shows the breakdown of funding paid to Staffordshire from 1994–95 and to 1999–2000, and the Treasury Gross Domestic Product deflators used to convert the totals to the same price base (1995–96) to show the real terms increases.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has given local authorities and the police about responsibility for initiating anti-social behaviour order procedures in cases where the behaviour complained of emanates from a privately owned house. [97092]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Guidance on the operation of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) was issued in March 1999 and applies to anti-social behaviour from wherever it emanates. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary wrote in October to Chief Executives and Chief Officers of police to remind them of the use to which ASBOs could be put.

Wildlife Protection

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many successful wildlife protection prosecutions were launched in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by police authority area. [97118]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Available information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database is given in the table.

Number of defendants proceeded [1] against at magistrates courts and convicted [2] at all courts for wildlife offences [3] by type of offence and police force area, 1998 [4]

	Summary offences [5]		Indictable offences	
Police force area	*Total proceeded against [1]*	*Total convicted [2]*	*Total proceeded against [1]*	*Total convicted [2]*
Avon and Somerset	118	102	—	—
Bedfordshire	16	14	—	—
Cambridgeshire	91	82	1	1
Cheshire	124	97	—	—
Cleveland	40	37	—	—
Cumbria	94	85	—	—
Derbyshire	116	99	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	129	109	1	—
Dorset	56	24	—	—
Durham	40	38	8	8
Essex	151	129	—	—
Gloucestershire	79	66	—	—
Greater Manchester	95	82	1	1
Hampshire	100	82	3	2
Hertfordshire	157	124	—	—
Humberside	168	146	—	—
Kent	32	26	—	—
Lancashire	169	144	3	3
Leicestershire	164	147	—	—
Lincolnshire	100	91	—	—
Merseyside	49	41	—	—
Metropolitan Police [6]	151	134	5	4
Norfolk	118	113	—	—
North Yorkshire	165	150	26	25
Northamptonshire	29	27	3	3
Northumbria	100	91	—	1
Nottinghamshire	78	67	—	—
South Yorkshire	136	122	—	—
Staffordshire	147	130	—	—
Suffolk	47	38	—	—
Surrey	73	67	—	—
Sussex	175	163	—	—
Thames Valley	204	191	—	—
Warwickshire	167	154	5	5
West Mercia	136	122	—	—
West Midlands	80	70	1	1
West Yorkshire	78	72	—	—
Wiltshire	60	49	—	—
Dyfed Powys	110	90	—	—
Gwent	51	42	—	—
North Wales	82	63	—	—
South Wales	66	55	20	18
England and Wales	4,341	3,775	77	72

[1] Includes defendants arrested and summoned by the police and those also summoned by others (ie RSPCA or RSPB).
[2] Includes defendants proceeded against in earlier years or for other offences.
[3] Includes offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Protection of Badgers Act 1992, Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996, fishery law; and poaching and gaming laws.
[4] Provisional
[5] Excludes offences under s13 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and others relating to wildlife offences which cannot be identified separately from other summary offences.
[6] Includes City of London.

Animal Toxicity Tests

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the number of additional animal toxicity tests likely to be required over the next 15 years as a result of the EU Biocidal Product Directive (98/8/EC); [96565]

(2) what assessment he has made of the likely overall impact of the EU Biocidal Product Directive (98/8/EC) on numbers of tests on animals over the next 15 years. [96566]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is not possible for the Home Office to give an estimation of the likely scale and nature of animal use under the Directive.

The consequence of regulations coming into force will be a requirement for all biocidal products and their active substances to be authorised for use. The new requirement may increase animal testing in this area.

To minimise duplicate testing, however, Article 13 of the Directive requires authorisation holders to take all reasonable steps to share data. The Article also allows for member states to oblige applicants to share data in order to avoid unnecessary and duplicate testing on animals.

The Home Office is currently working with other Government departments and agencies to agree a strategy for increasing data sharing in United Kingdom regulatory safety testing.

Electric Shock Dog Collar

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Prison Service still has an electric shock dog collar in its possession; and how many times such a collar has been used since November 1998. [97109]

Mr. Boateng: The Prison Service is no longer in possession of an electric shock dog collar. Records held at the National Dog Training Centre indicate that the collar was used seven times on six dogs between March 1993 and July 1995. The electric collar was to be used only when authorised by the head of the National Dog Training Centre. It was used on adult dogs as part of a training course or remedial training and only as a last resort, when other methods of correcting a dog in control-related exercises had failed. The collar has not been used since 6 July 1995. On 14 April 1999, an amendment was made to Prison Service orders. It instructed that electric collars were not to be used, under any circumstances, on Prison Service dogs during training.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have an electric shock dog collar; and how many times such a device has been used since July 1998. [97110]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Of the 43 police forces in England and Wales, 20 possess electric shock dog collars for use in training. The device has been used by eight forces on a total of 37 occasions since July 1998. I understand that the relevant committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers is to review the use of this item.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if an action plan for increasing the representation of women in public life has been *(a)* prepared by his Department and *(b)* published since November 1998. [94852]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *682*.

School Inspections

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many requests have been made by parents for an urgent inspection of a maintained school in each year since 1996. [96858]

Ms Estelle Morris: Subject to the maximum interval between inspections, which is specified in regulations, it is for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to determine when each school will be inspected. He frequently receives letters from parents expressing concerns about particular schools. Figures are not kept on how many of these letters ask him to conduct an early inspection.

Class Sizes

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere on infant class sizes, if the £620 million to which the letter refers has previously been announced. [96769]

Ms Estelle Morris: Yes. The money was announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his oral statement of 15 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 412–25. In his letter of 27 October, my right hon. Friend sought to remind the hon. Member that Local Education Authorities were being provided with the resources to meet the Government's pledge to reduce the size of infant classes to 30 or below.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere, if he will provide a breakdown of classes taught by one teacher *(a)* in primary school classes other than infant classes and *(b)* in secondary schools in each local authority on the same basis as in his letter. [96768]

Ms Estelle Morris: The requested data were not collected in September 1999. National level data for January 1999 were published in the Statistical First Release SFR 2/1999 'Class Sizes in Maintained Schools in England: January 1999 (provisional)'. New data will be collected in January 2000.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Hertsmere of 27 October on infant class sizes, if he will publish the figures for infant class sizes for each local authority so as to include the number of pupils entering in the Autumn term under staggered entry. [96767]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have estimated nationally that the staggered intake will lead to an extra 6,000 pupils in classes of over 30 pupils, over and above those already reflected in the 1999 September Class Size Count. This figure has been included in the 181,000 total which was published on 27 October.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere on infant class sizes, how many teachers were employed in maintained schools in each of the last five years; and how many he estimates will be employed in each of the next five years. [96770]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following shows teacher numbers (full-time equivalents) in maintained schools in England:

January 1995: 408,964
January 1996: 409,022
January 1997: 409,326
January 1998: 407,065
January 1999: 411,293.

Estimates of the number of teachers that will be employed in future years are not available. Figures to 1998 inclusive reflect the spending decisions of the previous administration.

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of infant-age pupils in the London Borough of Redbridge were in classes of over 30 in each of the years 1990 to 1999. [96892]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available information is shown in the following table.

Percentage of Key Stage 1 pupils in classes of size 31 or more in Redbridge LEA

Date	*Percentage of pupils*
September 1999	11.0
January 1999	25.2
January 1998	28.8
January 1997	32.5
January 1996	48.5

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere on infant class sizes, how many pupils in Key Stage 2 in primary schools were in classes of *(a)* over 36 pupils and *(b)* over 40 pupils in (i) September 1998 and (ii) September 1999. [96915]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information available is shown in the following table.

Classes as taught: pupils in classes taught by one teacher January each year Key Stage 2

	1999	*1998*
Classes of size: over 36 pupils		
Number of pupils	38,960	40,440
Percentage of pupils	1.8	1.9
Classes of size: over 40 pupils		
Number of pupils	1,690	2,390
Percentage of pupils	0.08	0.11

Exclusions

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils were excluded from UK schools *(a)* temporarily and *(b)* indefinitely, for the last year for which figures are

available, broken down by age and local education authority. [96669]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The category of indefinite exclusion was abolished with effect from 1 September 1994. The latest available information on pupils permanently excluded from schools in England is shown in the following table.

Information on fixed period (temporary) exclusions was not collected for the school year 1998–99.

For information on schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, I refer my hon. Friend to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Number of permanent exclusions by age and local education authority area
England 1997–98

	Age[1]								
	3	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*
England	0	0	81	131	176	254	368	616	703
North East	0	0	3	3	3	10	20	37	42
Hartlepool	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
Middlesbrough	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
Redcar and Cleveland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Stockton-on-Tees	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	0
Darlington	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1
Durham	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	10
Northumberland	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	8	7
Gateshead	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	5	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	0	0	2	1	3	4	4	11
North Tyneside	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	3	4
South Tyneside	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	2
Sunderland	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	2
North West and Merseyside	0	0	13	20	25	42	58	117	90
North West	0	0	9	15	20	31	45	90	62
Halton	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Warrington	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1
Cheshire	0	0	2	4	4	4	2	7	3
Cumbria	0	0	1	0	1	2	2	2	4
Bolton	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	5	2
Bury	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2
Manchester	0	0	0	2	6	5	12	20	18
Oldham	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	3	3
Rochdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4
Salford	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	6	2
Tameside	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	7	3
Trafford	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0
Wigan	0	0	1	1	2	3	4	5	7
Blackburn with Darwen	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	3	0
Blackpool	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Lancashire	0	0	2	0	4	8	9	20	12
Merseyside	0	0	4	5	5	11	13	27	28
Knowsley	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Liverpool	0	0	1	3	1	2	8	13	17
St Helens	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2
Sefton	0	0	3	0	2	6	2	5	5
Wirral	0	0	0	2	1	2	3	6	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	0	0	4	8	17	31	29	67	71
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	0	0	0	0	3	33	1	1	7
North East Lincolnshire	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	5	4
North Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	4
York	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	0
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	2
Barnsley	0	0	2	0	0	1	4	1	1
Doncaster	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	4	15
Rotherham	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Sheffield	0	0	0	4	4	3	9	12	10
Bradford	0	0	0	1	4	7	0	7	12
Calderdale	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	1
Kirklees	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	5	3
Leeds	0	0	1	2	1	9	4	14	9
Wakefield	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0
East Midlands	0	0	5	11	14	11	27	44	71
Derby	0	0	0	1	0	4	5	6	10
Derbyshire	0	0	0	2	4	1	4	6	6
Leicester City	0	0	0	4	1	2	7	4	10

Number of permanent exclusions by age and local education authority area
England 1997–98

	Age[1]								
	3	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*
Rutland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	2	9
Lincolnshire	0	0	1	1	5	1	0	9	9
Northamptonshire	0	0	2	0	2	2	4	5	13
City of Nottingham	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	6
Nottinghamshire	0	0	1	2	2	1	3	6	8
West Midlands	0	0	11	13	20	28	49	61	76
Herefordshire	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0
Worcestershire	0	0	1	2	1	0	3	6	6
Telford and Wrekin	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2
Shropshire	0	0	0	1	0	0	4	1	2
Stoke	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	4
Staffordshire	0	0	1	3	1	2	6	2	10
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	3	1	5	1	5
Birmingham	0	0	6	7	7	15	19	14	22
Coventry	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	13	8
Dudley	0	0	1	0	1	2	4	3	2
Sandwell	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	3	3
Solihull	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
Walsall	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	5
Wolverhampton	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	11	6
Eastern	0	0	10	15	22	26	42	48	57
Luton	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	2
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	3	4
City of Peterborough	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	3
Southend	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	1
Thurrock	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	3	4
Essex	0	0	1	2	3	7	11	6	7
Hertfordshire	0	0	6	8	6	8	13	10	15
Norfolk	0	0	0	3	9	4	7	9	16
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	1	4	6	7	11
London	0	0	13	30	31	49	55	107	137
Inner London	0	0	8	17	18	28	24	52	54
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Camden	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	5	5
Hackney	0	0	0	3	1	5	7	6	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	0	0	5	1	2	3	2	4
Haringey	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	5
Islington	0	0	0	2	3	0	2	2	5
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	2
Lambeth	0	0	1	1	0	3	3	7	2
Lewisham	0	0	1	0	4	7	3	7	6
Newham	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	7	3
Southwark	0	0	2	1	4	1	1	6	12
Tower Hamlets	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	1
Wandsworth	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	3	5
Westminster	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	4
Outer London	0	0	5	13	13	21	31	55	83
Barking and Dagenham	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	4	2
Barnet	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	3	2
Bexley	0	0	1	0	1	2	2	7	3
Brent	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	2	4
Bromley	0	0	2	3	0	1	1	3	6
Croydon	0	0	1	1	1	2	4	8	12
Ealing	0	0	1	0	0	3	3	4	15
Enfield	0	0	0	1	2	1	3	3	6
Greenwich	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	6	5
Harrow	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	1
Havering	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	3
Hillingdon	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
Hounslow	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	5	5
Kingston-upon-Thames	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Merton	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4
Redbridge	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
Richmond-upon-Thames	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Suton	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	2
Waltham Forest	0	0	0	2	2	2	3	1	7

Number of permanent exclusions by age and local education authority area England 1997–98

	Age								
	3	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*
South East	0	0	15	24	24	35	53	85	89
Bracknell Forest	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	1
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2
West Berkshire	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	1
Reading	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	1
Slough	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	2	1
Wokingham	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
Milton Keynes	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	1
Buckinghamshire	0	0	2	3	0	3	2	3	0
Brighton and Hove	0	0	0	1	1	3	1	5	1
East Sussex	0	0	0	2	1	3	1	5	3
Portsmouth	0	0	0	1	0	2	5	2	1
Southampton	0	0	0	2	4	1	1	3	5
Hampshire	0	0	2	5	2	9	7	14	16
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medway	0	0	1	2	0	2	3	8	5
Kent	0	0	5	4	7	5	9	13	27
Oxfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	4
Surrey	0	0	3	2	0	2	7	8	12
West Sussex	0	0	1	1	4	2	2	12	5
South West	0	0	7	7	20	22	35	50	70
Bath and NE Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	6
City of Bristol	0	0	2	0	3	5	8	3	17
North Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
South Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5
Cornwall	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	4
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Torbay	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	2
City of Plymouth	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	6	6
Devon	0	0	1	4	5	6	6	6	8
Bournemouth	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	2
Poole	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Dorset	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	2	3
Gloucestershire	0	0	1	1	3	3	5	3	6
Somerset	0	0	2	0	1	2	1	6	3
Swindon	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	1
Wiltshire	0	0	1	0	3	3	5	6	4

Number of permanent exclusions by age and local education authority area. England 1997–98

	12	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*	*Total*
England	1,564	2,385	3,351	2,447	192	24	5	1	12,298
North East	91	102	200	156	9	1	0	0	677
Hartlepool	5	6	8	11	0	0	0	0	34
Middlesbrough	4	2	6	6	0	0	0	0	23
Redcar and Cleveland	9	7	8	7	0	0	0	0	35
Stockton-on-Tees	2	5	22	10	0	0	0	0	43
Darlington	4	4	10	7	0	0	0	0	29
Durham	16	21	27	26	1	0	0	0	107
Northumberland	15	10	25	19	4	0	0	0	93
Gateshead	1	1	10	8	2	0	0	0	32
Newcastle upon Tyne	15	14	29	17	1	1	0	0	102
North Tyneside	8	5	22	12	0	0	0	0	59
South Tyneside	7	14	24	22	0	0	0	0	74
Sunderland	5	13	9	11	1	0	0	0	46
North West and Merseyside	218	377	516	403	8	2	0	0	1,889
North West	171	283	394	329	7	1	0	0	1,457
Halton	2	5	8	6	0	0	0	0	23
Warrington	2	8	10	8	0	0	0	0	32
Cheshire	12	16	30	26	2	0	0	0	112
Cumbria	4	24	36	24	0	0	0	0	100
Bolton	8	13	32	20	0	0	0	0	86
Bury	10	13	14	10	0	0	0	0	52
Manchester	22	28	48	36	1	0	0	0	198
Oldham	4	19	15	20	0	1	0	0	71
Rochdale	3	6	8	5	0	0	0	0	29
Salford	14	24	21	22	0	0	0	0	93
Tameside	11	16	16	17	0	0	0	0	73

Number of permanent exclusions by age and local education authority area. England 1997–98

	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Total
Trafford	5	7	7	10	1	0	0	0	33
Wigan	9	17	21	16	0	0	0	0	86
Blackburn with Darwen	13	14	19	9	1	0	0	0	62
Blackpool	10	6	7	12	0	0	0	0	40
Lancashire	38	59	82	65	2	0	0	0	301
Merseyside	47	94	122	74	1	1	0	0	432
Knowsley	1	9	11	10	1	0	0	0	34
Liverpool	27	41	65	28	0	0	0	0	206
St Helens	4	7	10	11	0	1	0	0	38
Sefton	9	18	21	14	0	0	0	0	85
Wirral	6	19	15	11	0	0	0	0	69
Yorkshire and Humberside	180	251	338	246	15	4	0	1	1,262
East Riding of Yorkshire	3	9	6	3	1	0	0	0	24
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	15	14	17	5	0	0	0	0	66
North East Lincolnshire	7	6	8	18	0	0	0	0	52
North Lincolnshire	4	6	8	18	0	0	0	0	32
York	6	10	12	3	0	0	0	0	38
North Yorkshire	9	15	20	27	3	0	0	0	82
Barnsley	8	11	13	6	0	0	0	0	47
Doncaster	40	49	51	29	1	2	0	1	197
Rotherham	7	6	13	5	0	0	0	0	35
Sheffield	18	22	31	15	0	0	0	0	128
Bradford	12	20	46	34	2	0	0	0	145
Calderdale	5	9	10	6	1	0	0	0	38
Kirklees	5	8	28	11	1	0	0	0	66
Leeds	28	48	55	49	3	2	0	0	225
Wakefield	13	17	21	29	3	0	0	0	87
East Midlands	131	190	275	213	15	0	1	0	1,008
Derby	12	16	36	21	0	0	1	0	112
Derbyshire	20	19	46	23	0	0	0	0	131
Leicester City	20	24	20	17	0	0	0	0	109
Rutland	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Leicestershire	7	20	24	29	1	0	0	0	97
Lincolnshire	15	24	26	34	3	0	0	0	128
Northamptonshire	16	24	40	25	8	0	0	0	141
City of Nottingham	19	22	31	31	0	0	0	0	116
Nottinghamshire	22	41	51	33	3	0	0	0	173
West Midlands	204	288	466	305	23	0	0	0	1,544
Herefordshire	7	7	8	5	2	0	0	0	33
Worcestershire	7	12	43	43	2	0	0	0	126
Telford and Wrekin	16	14	18	15	1	0	0	0	69
Shropshire	3	6	17	16	0	0	0	0	50
Stoke	12	22	40	18	0	0	0	0	101
Staffordshire	15	27	60	26	3	0	0	0	156
Warwickshire	13	21	31	21	3	0	0	0	104
Birmingham	62	87	107	41	3	0	0	0	390
Coventry	22	25	25	22	0	0	0	0	122
Dudley	4	8	21	15	3	0	0	0	64
Sandwell	16	33	32	34	0	0	0	0	125
Solihull	11	8	17	14	0	0	0	0	54
Walsall	6	10	33	25	3	0	0	0	87
Wolverhampton	10	8	14	10	3	0	0	0	63
Eastern	115	201	252	215	16	0	1	0	1,020
Luton	3	7	5	7	0	0	0	0	28
Bedfordshire	12	12	29	14	1	0	1	0	81
City of Peterborough	2	8	16	11	1	0	0	0	46
Cambridgeshire	5	9	15	11	0	0	0	0	46
Southend	5	7	7	8	3	0	0	0	37
Thurrock	6	13	11	7	0	0	0	0	48
Essex	29	48	46	47	0	0	0	0	207
Hertfordshire	20	53	59	50	8	0	0	0	256
Norfolk	16	22	30	36	0	0	0	0	142
Suffolk	17	22	34	24	3	0	0	0	129
London	278	396	523	356	41	10	1	0	2,027
Inner London	112	147	174	106	13	3	0	0	756
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Camden	3	8	17	4	2	0	0	0	50
Hackney	6	7	9	2	0	0	0	0	46

Number of permanent exclusions by age and local education authority area. England 1997–98

	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	Total
Hammersmith and Fulham	9	11	6	9	0	0	0	0	52
Haringey	5	13	13	5	0	0	0	0	46
Islington	10	8	11	4	0	0	0	0	47
Kensington and Chelsea	7	7	9	8	0	0	0	0	38
Lambeth	10	13	11	11	0	0	0	0	62
Lewisham	12	14	17	4	2	0	0	0	77
Newham	5	12	15	6	0	1	0	0	54
Southwark	13	24	20	12	0	0	0	0	96
Tower Hamlets	10	10	12	11	0	0	0	0	49
Wandsworth	3	13	21	14	0	0	0	0	76
Westminster	9	7	13	16	9	2	0	0	63
Outer London	166	249	349	250	28	7	1	0	1,271
Barking and Dagenham	4	11	13	7	1	0	0	0	47
Barnet	11	12	13	20	10	1	0	0	77
Bexley	9	16	21	8	2	0	0	0	72
Brent	13	24	23	20	5	1	0	0	97
Bromley	12	18	30	16	0	1	0	0	93
Croydon	14	13	23	29	0	0	0	0	108
Ealing	11	13	13	17	0	2	0	0	82
Enfield	9	12	24	21	5	0	0	0	87
Greenwich	11	10	14	12	1	0	0	0	61
Harrow	8	13	24	8	0	0	0	0	60
Havering	12	15	18	18	0	0	0	0	70
Hillingdon	5	18	19	11	0	0	0	0	58
Hounslow	10	13	22	9	2	2	0	0	71
Kingston-upon-Thames	3	7	11	4	1	0	1	0	29
Merton	5	8	14	2	0	0	0	0	36
Redbridge	7	9	11	3	0	0	0	0	35
Richmond-upon-Thames	5	10	21	16	0	0	0	0	54
Suton	4	11	12	10	0	0	0	0	45
Waltham Forest	13	16	23	19	1	0	0	0	89
South East	227	355	513	355	39	6	2	0	1,822
Bracknell Forest	4	10	11	6	0	0	0	0	38
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	2	7	10	12	2	0	0	0	38
West Berkshire	4	10	6	8	1	0	0	0	35
Reading	10	17	13	8	1	0	0	0	54
Slough	0	9	11	11	0	0	0	0	40
Wokingham	6	5	12	3	0	0	0	0	32
Milton Keynes	5	6	17	10	2	0	0	0	44
Buckinghamshire	9	14	18	21	1	1	0	0	77
Brighton and Hove	6	8	17	8	0	1	0	0	52
East Sussex	18	13	39	16	1	0	0	0	102
Portsmouth	10	20	8	10	0	0	0	0	59
Southampton	10	11	18	12	0	0	0	0	67
Hampshire	33	50	81	49	2	0	0	0	270
Isle of Wight	3	0	8	3	0	0	0	0	14
Medway	16	11	27	14	1	0	0	0	90
Kent	44	75	97	60	10	2	2	0	360
Oxfordshire	10	13	23	19	3	0	0	0	77
Surrey	24	38	42	40	11	2	0	0	191
West Sussex	13	38	55	45	4	0	0	0	182
South West	120	225	268	198	26	1	0	0	1,049
Bath and NE Somerset	6	11	7	14	1	0	0	0	50
City of Bristol	23	36	37	16	1	0	0	0	151
North Somerset	5	11	12	13	1	0	0	0	48
South Gloucestershire	5	8	10	14	2	0	0	0	47
Cornwall	8	17	22	24	0	0	0	0	81
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Torbay	4	10	5	4	0	0	0	0	29
City of Plymouth	4	6	12	7	0	0	0	0	43
Devon	9	22	27	18	1	0	0	0	113
Bournemouth	3	7	14	9	1	0	0	0	39
Poole	0	8	9	1	0	0	0	0	19
Dorset	8	13	9	15	11	0	0	0	66
Gloucestershire	15	40	43	18	6	0	0	0	144
Somerset	13	14	14	18	0	1	0	0	75
Swindon	4	5	13	9	0	0	0	0	38
Wiltshire	13	17	34	18	2	0	0	0	106

[1] Age as at 31 August 1997

Source:

Annual Schools' Census 1999

Working Time Regulations (Derogations)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if derogations from EU directive 94/33/EC have been entered in relation to the Armed Forces. [96588]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

Articles 9 and 10 of EU Directive 94/33/EC provide for derogations for adolescents involved in work performed in the context of the Armed Forces. To the extent that Articles 9 and 10 have been implemented in UK legislation by the Working Time Regulations, these derogations have also been incorporated in the Regulations.

DEFENCE

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the research conducted by Professor Hari Sharma of the University of Waterloo into links between illnesses in Gulf war veterans and exposure to depleted uranium, a copy of which was provided to his Departmen*. [94150]

Mr. Spellar: On 18 March 1999, my Department received a copy of a letter from Professor Sharma to the Chairman of the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association (NGV&FA) about testing the urine of some UK Gulf veterans for uranium isotopes. The content of the letter was assessed by the Ministry of Defence's statutorily appointed radiation protection advisers who concluded that it did not contain sufficient scientific information for the Department to properly review the research nor interpret Professor Sharma's results. Despite requests to Professor Sharma and the NGV&FA, as at 15 October 1999, my Department is yet to see scientifically robust, properly validated, and preferably peer reviewed hypotheses, methodologies and full results of Professor Sharma's work. My Department remains open minded on the issue of Gulf veterans' illnesses and keeps the situation under constant review as scientific knowledge develops. In the meantime, we have offered a further test to the veterans concerned. This would be undertaken at three testing establishments including one to be nominated by the veterans.

Arms Fair (Chertsey)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the representatives of the defence industry regarding the presence of landmine manufacturers at the arms fair in Chertsey in September. [95242]

Mr. Spellar: Prior to the opening of the exhibition, my Department was in regular contact with Defence Systems and Equipment International Ltd., the private company which working closely with the defence industry trade organisations organised the event at Chertsey. We made sure that DSEi Ltd. was fully aware of the Government's policies concerning the export of defence equipment, and we sought and obtained from them assurances that they would require exhibitors to comply with these policies and with UK legislation, including the Landmines Act 1998.

Following allegations in the British media that a Romanian company was promoting anti-personnel landmines at DSEi, we instructed the MOD Police to investigate the matter. Separately, the Romanian authorities have contacted the MOD to explain that, in error, their company had on its stand literature which mentioned an anti-personnel landmine. They have informed us that they stopped manufacturing this item in 1990, but that the company had not updated its equipment lists. We have received an apology from the Romanian authorities, but the MOD Police are still investigating the matter and will submit a file to the Crown Prosecution Service in due course.

Indonesia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Jakarta office of the Defence Export Services Organisation remains open. [96397]

Mr. Spellar: The First Secretary Defence Supply, who represents DESO in the British Embassy in Jakarta, has no role in the support of marketing and sales by British defence companies in Indonesia while the EU embargo is in force. The future of the post is currently under review.

Multi-role Armoured Vehicle Programme

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Government expect to sign the contract for the provision of the new Multi-role Armoured Vehicle programme; and if he will make a statement. [96569]

Mr. Spellar: It is expected that the contract for the development of the multi-role armoured vehicle will be signed soon.

MOD Police

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what external auditing there has been of the operation of the housing allowances for MOD police. [96444]

Mr. Spellar: None. The Ministry of Defence Police Agency regularly hosts audit visits from the National Audit Office. However, the National Audit Office have not focused on Ministry of Defence Police housing allowance at least since the inception of the Agency in 1996.

Departmental Staff

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff employed by his Department who were in a mobile grade and who did not have limited mobility, have been offered either compulsory early severance or compulsory early retirement terms (including those who volunteered for such terms) in the last two years. [96877]

Mr. Spellar: The details of any offers of Compulsory Early Retirement (CER) and Compulsory Early Severance (CES), which may or may not eventually be accepted, are not held centrally. However, during the period 1 October 1997 to 30 September 1999, records indicate that 351 mobile staff left the Ministry of Defence on CER/CES terms.

Territorial Army

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the strengths and *(b)* the cost of the Territorial Army in each year since 1995. [96866]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

HMS Fearless

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Fearless last put to sea. [96738]

Mr. Spellar: HMS Fearless is currently at sea, in the Mediterranean, participating in Exercise Bright Star, a multi-national amphibious exercise.

HMS Intrepid

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current crew level of HMS Intrepid expressed as a percentage of the total complement. [96735]

Mr. Spellar: The current crew level of HMS Intrepid is 15 which represents 100 per cent. of the total complement in her present reduced readiness state. In a fully operational state her complement would be 580.

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Intrepid last put to sea. [96739]

Mr. Spellar: HMS Intrepid was last at sea in March 1994.

Frigates and Destroyers

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the current operational availability of each of the Royal Navy's Type 22 frigates; [96740]

(2) what is the current operational availability of each of the Royal Navy's Type 42 destroyers; [96742]

(3) what is the current operational availability of each of the Royal Navy's Type 23 frigates. [96741]

Mr. Spellar: Of the Royal Navy's 32 frigates and destroyers, 27 are operationally available and the remaining five are in refit or protracted maintenance. A breakdown of their employment as at 29 October 1999 is set out in the table.

	Operational or engaged in preparing for service, trials or training	*Undergoing refit*
Type 22 frigates	Campbeltown, Coventry, Cumberland, Sheffield	Brave, Chatham, Cornwall
Type 23 frigates	Argyll, Grafton, Iron Duke, Marlborough, Monmouth, Montrose, Norfolk, Northumberland, Richmond, Somerset, Sutherland, Westminster	Lancaster
Type 42 destroyers	Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Gloucester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Southampton, York	Nottingham

The specific operational readiness of each ship is classified for security reasons, and is being withheld under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Public-private Partnerships

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many proposed public-private partnership programmes his Department has; and what the value of each is; [96650]

(2) how many public-private partnership programmes have been let since 2 May 1997; and with what value. [96651]

Mr. Spellar: To date my Department has signed 27 PFI contracts, representing a capital investment in defence by the private sector of some £1 billion. 17 of these contracts, with a total capital value of some £781 million, have been let since 2 May 1997, as follows:

	£ million
Armed Forces Pay and Administration Agency	150
Attack Helicopter Training Simulator	165
Central Scotland Family Quarters	13
Defence Fixed Telecommunications Service	70
Hawk Simulator	10
Joint Service Command Staff College	68
Medium Support Helicopter Air Crew Training Facility	100
Naval Recruitment and Training Agency Fire Fighting Training Simulator	35
RAF Basic Flying Training (Bulldog Replacement)	30
RAF Cosford/Shawbury—Family Quarters	13
RAF Fylingdales (Power Station)	7
RAF Lossiemouth Family Quarters	24
RAF Lyneham Sewerage	5
RAF Mail	12
Tidworth Garrison Provision of Sewerage Services	6
Tornado GR4 Simulator	65
Yeovilton Family Quarters	8

79 further PFI projects are in procurement or under consideration as follows:

	£ million
Abbey Wood Family Quarters	50–60
Accommodation Services in Cyprus	NYK
Adjutant General's Corps Training Group	25
Aerial Targets	NYK
Aldershot Barracks	NYK
Archer Class Support	NYK
Armoured Fighting Vehicles (RAC Bovington)	122
Army Foundation College	33
Ascension Petroleum Supply Depot	NYK
Astute Trainers	50
AWE Aldermaston Site Heating	18
AWE Management and Operation	NYK
Base Ordnance Depot Bicester	NYK
Battle Group Thermal Imaging	140
Bowman Training	NYK
"C" Vehicles	NYK

	£ million
Central Britain White Fleet	60
Colchester Garrison	180
Corsham Estate	NYK
Defence Animal Centre	9
Defence Housing Executive Information Systems	80 (whole life)
Defence NBC Centre	NYK
Defence Storage and Distribution Agency Marketing Partner	NYK
Defence Vetting Agency	NYK
Devonport Support Services	NYK
E3D Sentry Aircrew Training Service	10
Electronic Commerce Service (DECS)	NYK
Eurofighter Mission Support Centre	55
Expeditionary Camp Infrastructure	45
Falkland Island Communications Project	15
Field Electrical Power Supplies	65
Future Cargo Vehicle	350
Future Command and Liaison Vehicle	370
Future Fuel Vehicles	96
Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft	2,500
Future Wheeled Recovery Vehicle	160
Heavy Equipment Transporters	93
High Frequency/Low Frequency Communications	40
HMS Nelson	NYK
Infantry Training Centres	NYK
Initial Training Group (excluding Army Foundation College)	NYK
Inmarsat	6
Inner London Barracks	36
Joint Rapid Reaction Force Roll-on Roll-off Ferries	140
Joint Services Parachute Centre	NYK
Land Command Training Ranges	NYK
London District White Fleet	12
Main Building Refurbishment	175
Marchwood Military Port	NYK
Marine Service Vessels	NYK
Marketing Training Group Defence Agency Ground Training	NYK
MOD-wide Water and Sewerage Project Acquatrine	100
Multi-Engine Pilot and Rear Crew Training	NYK
Northern Calibration Facility	NYK
Northwood Estates Development Plan	38
Pay As You Dine	25
Petroleum Supply/Bulk Fuel Installation	17
Porton Down Power Station	4
Principal Casualty Recovery Ships	NYK
RAF Fire Training	NYK
RAF Halton	NYK
RAF Infrastructure	NYK
RAF Wyton Water and Sewerage	2
Records Storage and Management	15
Royal Logistics Corps Training Group Accommodation/Training Facilities	48
Royal School of Military Engineers	49
Royal School of Signals	5
Satellite TV	6
Scotland White Fleet	35
Skynet 5	750
South West White Fleet	24
Southern Britain White Fleet	50
Submarine Rescue	NYK
Surgeon General and Defence Secondary Care	NYK
Tidworth Garrison	150
Tri-Service Airfield Support Services	350
Tri-Service Materials Handling Service	39–50
Wattisham Family Quarters	5–60
Wattisham/Woodbridge Redevelopment	NYK

Note:
Capital values assessed against the estimated cost of public provision (the public sector comparator)

These projects will be pursued to completion if they can deliver best value for money for the tax payer. In a number of cases, it is premature to assign estimated capital values to them.

Additional Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and other PFI projects are likely to emerge in due course.

Phoenix UAV System

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Phoenix UAV system was deployed in Kosovo. [95972]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Yes. A Royal Artillery Phoenix Battery was deployed to Macedonia in June 1999 to conduct reconnaissance operations in support of operation ALLIED FORCE. Subsequently the Battery moved into Kosovo as part of the UK contribution to KFOR and assisted in verifying the Yugoslav withdrawal and compliance with the provisions of the Military Technical Agreement. The Battery was withdrawn in September.

Under-18-year-olds

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will undertake not to use members of the forces in conflict situations if they are under 18 years of age; and if he will make a statement. [96087]

Mr. Spellar: We recruit volunteers into the Armed Forces from the age of 16. Some of these personnel join their units, having completed training well into their 17th year, but prior to their 18th birthday. While the number involved is relatively small, these trained personnel who, having joined their units, contribute to the operational effectiveness of that unit. Removing these personnel from units would undermine unit cohesiveness as well as operational effectiveness. It would also be unpopular with the personnel themselves and could exacerbate the problems of retention and overstretch.

Porton Down

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to make available full details of experiments at Porton Down to the relatives of former participants in those experiments who are now deceased; and if he will make a statement. [96720]

Mr. Spellar: A dedicated 'Porton Down Volunteers Helpline' was set up in February 1998 to deal with inquiries from former service volunteers, or their relatives, wishing to obtain information about the experiments in which they participated. Following an inquiry, all the information held in the Porton Down records relating to the volunteers' attendance at Porton Down, together with an explanation of the type of tests in which they participated, is made available. The amount of information held can vary, depending on the type of test and when it took place. Former volunteers or their relatives are invited to visit Porton Down if they wish to examine the records for themselves and discuss their experiences with scientific staff.

Anyone wishing to contact the Helpline should write to Porton Down Volunteers, Room 37/Building 106, DERA Porton Down, Salisbury, Wiltshire SB4 OJQ. Alternatively, they can telephone them on 0845 603 9140.

SCOTLAND

Special Advisers

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Special Advisers are currently employed by his Department; and what was the ratio of Special Advisers to Ministers in each of the last eight years. [96716]

Dr. Reid: Special Advisers are appointed by and work for the Secretary of State for Scotland of the day.

I have three Special Advisers, one of whom is part-time and unpaid.

Details of the numbers of Special Advisers employed in each of the last eight years by my predecessors is as follows:

	Special advisers
1999	3
1998	3
1997	2
1996	2
1995	2
1994	2
1993	2
1992	2

Departmental Staff

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many civil servants were working in his Department and where their primary location was for June, July, August, September and October. [96727]

Dr. Reid: The total numbers of civil servants working in my Department at the end of each month was as follows (the figures include the staff of the Advocate General's office shown in brackets):

	London based	*Edinburgh based*
June	29(5)	18(17)
July	32(5)	18(17)
August	32(5)	21(19)
September	33(5)	23(19)
October	33(5)	31(20)

In addition I have three Special Advisers, one of whom is part-time and unpaid.

Official Residences

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the running costs for his official residences since June and estimate the annual cost for 1999–2000. [96722]

Dr. Reid: I have no official residences.

Ministerial Payments

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the level of payments to Ministers who were formerly in his Department since 7 May. [96723]

Dr. Reid: From 7 May until 16 May, the Ministers of The Scottish Office were:

The right hon. Donald Dewar MP
The right hon. Helen Liddell MP
Mr. Henry McLeish MP
Mr. Sam Galbraith MP
Mr. Calum Macdonald MP
The Lord Sewel of Gilcomstoun
The Lord Macdonald of Tradeston.

Mr. Dewar was paid as Secretary of State, Mrs. Liddell and Mr. McLeish at the level of Ministers of State and the other Ministers at the level of Parliamentary Under-Secretary, except Lord Macdonald, who was unpaid.

From 17 May until 28 July, Mr. Macdonald, Lord Sewel and Lord Macdonald were Ministers in my Department at the level of Parliamentary Under-Secretary. Lord Sewel and Mr. Macdonald also received payments on leaving the Government on 28 July, in accordance with section 4 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991.

Mr. Brian Wilson MP was appointed to my Department on 29 July and is paid at the level of Minister of State.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Mice

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the projects undertaken by his Department using mice from his Department's mouse-breeding facilities since 1 May 1997. [94468]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* Officials in my Department have prepared a list of projects in the following table.

Use of mice for experimental purposes bred in MAFF laboratories since 1 May 1997

	Project
FT0177	Characterisation of the BSE infectious agent
FT0658	Improving prospects for TSE control in sheep and goats by studies of host genotype, isolates and their invivo and invitro interaction
FT0799	Immunohistological examination of tissues from mouse bioassay of TSE in Greater Kudu
OM0037	Investigation of scrapie infectivity and PrP genotype in clinically normal cast ewes from infected flocks
QI0002	Ubiquitin conjugates in bovine brain—a biochemical approach
SC0042	Development of a murine model for study of the pathogenesis of BSE by alimentary infection
SE1736	Experimental production of bovine tissues for validation of diagnostic tests
SE1746	Characterisation and validation of a serum metabolite as a marker for BSE in the live animal
SE1753	Preparation of more sensitive bioassay models for the improved detection, differentiation and diagnosis of the BSE agent
SE1802/1816	Transmissibility of BSE to pigs by injection with brain homogenate
SE1803/1817	Transmissibility of BSE to pigs by oral exposure to brain homogenate

Use of mice for experimental purposes bred in MAFF laboratories since 1 May 1997

	Project
SE1804/1818	Transmissibility of BSE to cattle by oronasal exposure to placentae of affected cattle
SE1805	Transmissibility of BSE to domestic fowl by injection with brain homogenate
SE1806	Transmissibility of BSE to domestic fowl by oral exposure to brain homogenate
SE1813/1822	Transmissibility of scrapie to pigs by oral exposure to brain homogenate
SE1828	The exposure of British sheep and cattle to mites
SE1829	Replication of scrapie and BSE prions in mites
SE1901	Pathogenesis of experimental BSE to cattle
SE1909	Studies of the cellular and humoral responses of distal ileum mucosa and mesenteric lymph nodes in the pathogenesis of BSE
SE1910	Small virus-like particles: immunostaining in experimental scrapie rodent brain: occurrence in brains of animals with natural TSE
SE1919	Studies to identify possible homologies between scrapie agents in the British sheep population and the agent of BSE by strain typing in mice
SE1929	Studies of BSE in sheep of known PrP genotypes
SE1930	Further studies of the effect of oral inoculum dose on attack rate and incubation period of BSE in cattle
SE1938	Strain typing of isolates of natural scrapie: correlation with host PrP genotype and pathological phenotype
SE1941	Studies to investigate the pathogenicity, phenotype and pathogenesis of endemic scrapie in cattle
SE1942	The attack rate and phenotype of scrapie-like disease on transmission to cattle of fresh and rendered pools of scrapie
TS4003	Urine chemistry for BSE
PV0410	Validation of population census methods for house mice
VC0410	Investigations into the use of semiochemicals for vertebrate pest population control
VC0407	Development of vertebrate repellents derived from chemical signals
VC0405	Development of methods to assess and improve the humaneness of vertebrate trapping techniques
PN0922	Assessment of risk to birds and mammals from solid pesticide formulations

Correspondence

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many replies he has received since 1 July from *(a)* prisons, *(b)* health authorities and *(c)* local authorities to letters sent by him urging them to obtain products of the highest welfare and animal hygiene standards; [95775]

(2) how many letters he has written since 1 July to *(a)* prisons, *(b)* health authorities and *(c)* local authorities urging them to obtain products of the highest welfare and animal hygiene standards; [95776]

(3) further to his oral answer of 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 1141, answering letters about public sector meat purchases, on what date the letters he referred to were sent. [97115]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* I wrote on 27 October to 150 local authorities concerning both beef and pigmeat, and additionally to 131 prisons and 401 health authorities concerning pigmeat on the same date. I have since received a number of responses.

Sheep Sales

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total number of (1) ewes on British farms and (2) lambs sold to market was in each of the years 1990 to 1998. [96546]

Ms Quin: The number of (1) breeding ewes on agricultural holdings in the UK at 1 June and (2) clean sheep and lambs marketed in the UK are shown below for the years 1990 to 1998.

	Breeding ewes on holdings at 1 June [1]	*Clean sheep and lambs marketed* [2]
1990	21,241	19,181
1991	21,090	20,726
1992	21,112	[3]19,132
1993	21,282	19,204
1994	21,273	18,330
1995	20,830	18,673
1996	20,550	17,358
1997	20,696	16,104
1998	21,260	[4]18,162

[1] The figures come from the June Agricultural and Horticultural Census and relate to the position on main and minor holdings. Up to 1994, the figures relate to ewes kept for breeding, including draft and cast ewes and two-tooth ewes put, or to be put, to the ram. From 1995, the figures relate to ewes and shearlings that have produced lambs in the last year (whether intended for further breeding or slaughter) and female sheep (one year and over) put, or to be put, to the ram.

[2] The figures consist of home fed slaughterings and live exports, and have been adjusted to take account of unrecorded trade.

[3] For comparability with other years, the figures have been adjusted from a 53 week to a 52 week basis.

[4] Provisional.

School Milk

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department is taking in EU institutions in respect of the funding of the school milk scheme. [96881]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend the Minister raised the question of the future of the EU school milk scheme at the Agriculture Council in June when he received a very positive response from other member states. We continue to lobby the Commission for the scheme to remain in place.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in

Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94979]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its PSA, and the measures of success it will use in the OPA published in March this year. A full list of the targets and target dates for Agencies and Executive NDPBs can be found annually in the Next Steps Report and Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies Report.

These high level targets are supported at operational level by numerous targets to ensure delivery by individual units. Listing these operational targets would be inappropriate and disproportionate in terms of resources.

Diversification Grants

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for the introduction of diversification grants for non-assisted areas. [96705]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* We are currently considering what measures, including aid for diversification, we should introduce under the new Rural Development Regulation, in the light of responses to our recent consultation.

Milk Marque

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes he intends to make to Milk Marque following the report by the Competition Commission; and if he will make a statement. [96609]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister has no locus to require changes to be made to Milk Marque.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers he estimates will be affected by his proposals for Milk Marque. [96610]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister has made no such proposals. All the farmers who are members of Milk Marque will be affected directly by the action proposed by Milk Marque as a result of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report. There may be indirect effects on others.

Hens

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions have been brought against United Kingdom egg producers for being in contravention of legislation for the welfare of laying hens; and how many prosecutions there have been in other European Union countries in each of the last three years. [96753]

Mr. Morley: The number of prosecutions of UK egg producers brought by UK Agriculture Departments for offences in breach of animal welfare legislation in each of the last three years was two in 1996, four in 1997 and nil in 1998. Records of prosecutions taken by other bodies such as local authorities and the RSPCA are not kept centrally. Requests or information concerning prosecutions in other EU countries should be addressed to the individual member states.

Beef Exports

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the figures, by country of destination, for the export of British beef in *(a)* the last month prior to the introduction of the ban and for *(b)* the same month 12 months earlier. [96296]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The table shows UK exports of beef during March 1996, the last month prior to the beef ban, and the same month 12 months earlier, as recorded in the Official Overseas Trade Statistics. British beef is not separately identifiable from that of non-UK origin in the data.

	March 1995		*March 1996*	
Country of destination[1]	*Tonnes*	*Value (£ million)*	*Tonnes*	*Value (£ million)*
France	13,074	26.7	6,339	13.3
Italy	3,209	9.7	2,470	6.8
Netherlands	2,279	6.9	2,303	6.7
Irish Republic	3,855	6.0	3,292	5.8
South Africa	1,998	1.9	1,893	1.5
Spain	871	2.1	399	1.0
Denmark	645	1.5	441	1.2
Belgium-Luxembourg	592	1.7	177	0.9
Portugal	379	0.9	487	1.2
Germany	372	1.4	127	0.6
Others	5,411	7.1	1,400	2.4
Total	32,685	65.8	19,329	41.4

[1] This does not necessarily represent the final destination of the goods

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Helen Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to conduct a Quinquennial Review of the Pesticides Safety Directorate. [97430]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Pesticides Safety Directorate was established as an Executive Agency on 1 April 1993. I am today announcing the Quinquennial Review of this Agency, which will include an evaluation of the performance of the Agency, and reconsideration of the Prior Options relating to Agency status as well as the options required under Better Quality Services. If appropriate, the existing Framework Document will also be reviewed.

The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

to conduct an evaluation of the performance of the Agency since its inception;

to consider in the light of this evaluation, and the views of customers and other stakeholders, whether among the available options Agency status remains the most cost effective way of achieving MAFF's aims; and

if the review concludes that the Pesticides Safety Directorate should continue to function as an Executive Agency, then to consider what changes, if any, are required to the Framework Document in the light of the findings of the review. If, however, the review concludes that a different delivery system would provide high quality, more effective and better value for money services, to set out the rationale and to recommend an appropriate option to Ministers.

The review will be conducted by officials from MAFF working with officials from PSD in close consultation with the Cabinet Office and Treasury and with the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales.

It will draw on and take account of other relevant work, for example the considerations feeding into the White Paper and Bill to establish the Food Standards Agency, and other relevant material.

We shall be setting out the arrangements whereby interested parties will be given an opportunity to submit their views.

I hope to publish the outcome of the review in the second quarter of 2000.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Helen Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what plans he has to conduct a Quinquennial Review of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. [97429]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Veterinary Medicines Directorate was established as an Executive Agency on 2 April 1990. I am today announcing the Quinquennial Review of this Agency, which will include an evaluation of the performance of the Agency, and reconsideration of the Prior Options relating to Agency status as well as the options required under Better Quality Services. If appropriate, the existing Framework Document will also be reviewed.

The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

to conduct an evaluation of the performance of the Agency since the date of the last review;

to consider in the light of this evaluation, and the views of customers and other stakeholders, whether among the available options Agency status remains the most cost effective way of achieving MAFF's aims; and

if the review concludes that the Veterinary Medicines Directorate should continue to function as an Executive Agency, then to consider what changes, if any, are required to the Framework Document in the light of the findings of the review. If, however, the review concludes that a different delivery system would provide high quality, more effective and better value for money services, to set out the rationale and to recommend an appropriate option to Ministers.

The review will be conducted by officials from MAFF working with officials from VMD in close consultation with the Cabinet Office and Treasury. It will draw on and take account of other relevant work, for example the considerations feeding into the White Paper and Bill to establish the Food Standards Agency, and other relevant material.

We shall be setting out the arrangements whereby interested parties will be given an opportunity to submit their views.

I hope to publish the outcome of the review in the second quarter of 2000.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Fair Trade

11. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in promoting the purchase of fair trade goods by Departments and other public bodies. [95590]

Mr. Foulkes: My Department takes every opportunity to promote fair trade products and also to support ethical trading in mainstream business. As my hon. Friend knows, fair trade tea and coffee are available in all the Department for International Development (DFID) outlets and in the House of Commons. I understand that a number of Departments have considered stocking fair trade products.

16. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress there has been among UK manufacturers in adopting a fair trade approach to the purchase of agricultural commodities from developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [95595]

Clare Short: A growing number of products have obtained the FairTrade Mark from the Fairtrade Foundation. Seventy-five such products (covering coffee, tea, cocoa and honey) are now available, compared to 50 a year ago. The FairTrade Mark tends to be applied for more by alternative trading organisations than large UK manufacturers.

Companies can also trade in a way which has a positive impact on the livelihoods of the poor but does not meet the requirements for certification through the FairTrade Foundation. For example, companies can work with the Ethical Trading Initiative, which concentrates on codes of conduct for responsible business. The Ethical Trading Initiative now has fifteen members; one of the most recent is the Tea Sourcing Partnership, whose members represent 60 per cent. of tea packed in the UK.

Multinational Companies

12. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the impact of multinational companies on developing countries. [95591]

Clare Short: The private sector and multinational companies are key to achieving the economic growth necessary to meet the international poverty reduction targets.

We have established a Business Partnership Unit to strengthen our links with the private sector. We have also established a resource centre to help business to access information, expertise and contacts to help them implement socially responsible business and examine and monitor their impact in poor countries. We have provided funding and support to the Ethical Trading Initiative which brings together business, trade unions and non-governmental organisations to examine supply chains in poorer countries against an agreed code of conduct, including key commitments on labour standards.

Zimbabwe

13. **Mr. Walter:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the Government of Zimbabwe regarding United Kingdom assistance to the land resettlement programme. [95592]

Clare Short: We believe that land reforms are needed, as part of a strategy to reduce poverty in Zimbabwe. We have consistently told the Government that as part of such

a strategy we would be prepared to support a land reform programme that is transparent, cost-effective, properly managed and on which local people are consulted.

Fraud

14. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on measures to combat fraud in the provision of overseas aid. [95593]

Clare Short: My Department has strong control systems designed to ensure regularity, propriety and value for money in the expenditure of our budget. These systems are reviewed by our internal auditors and they are regularly updated. Our systems are also subject to examination by the National Audit Office (NAO).

There were nine cases of fraud reported in our 1998–99 Annual Fraud Return. There were no reported cases involving the Department for International Development (DFID) staff. In all cases action has been taken to improve systems of control to avoid any recurrence. Legal action is pending for the recovery of DFID funds in three of these cases.

World Trade Organisation

15. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with non-governmental organisations on the implications for developing countries of the agenda for the Seattle ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation. [95594]

Clare Short: We are keen to promote dialogue and discussion with civil society. Ministers and officials from across Government meet regularly with non-governmental organisations and a wide range of other civil society representatives, to discuss trade-related issues. On 2 March, I made a speech entitled "Future Multilateral Trade Negotiations: A Development Round?" which has been circulated to NGOs and more widely. A copy is in the Library of the House.

This morning I made a speech to 100 civil society representatives where I set out how we can make the next trade Round work for the world's poor. I will also be speaking at a conference with NGOs and civil society at Seattle on 29 November.

20. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to ensure that developing countries will derive substantial development benefits from the next World Trade Organisation conference. [95599]

Clare Short: We are working bilaterally and with a wide range of other organisations, to help build the capacity of developing countries to participate effectively in the multilateral trading system. A full list of the work we are supporting has been placed in the Library of the House.

It is not widely appreciated that three quarters of the members of the World Trade Organisation are developing countries. This means that they are in a position to make great gains and improve their development prospects in the next trade round. It also means that agreement in the next round is dependant on developing country support. We have over the last two years provided £10 million to support training in developing countries negotiating capacity and ability to make use of trade opportunities. We are also working to encourage the EU, World Bank and other support agencies.

Debt Relief

17. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress in relieving the indebtedness of highly indebted poor countries. [95596]

Clare Short: International agreement on a substantial revision to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative was reached at the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF at the end of September. The new HIPC framework will deliver deeper debt relief, and provide this relief more quickly and to more countries. A comprehensive financing package is still being worked out. I made an additional pledge of $50 million towards the multilateral costs of HIPC, bringing the UK's total commitment to $221 million (approx £135 million). We are pressing the European Commission to bring forward proposals to make a substantial contribution towards the revised HIPC, as they announced at the Annual Meetings.

I very much welcome the agreement in Washington to tie HIPC debt relief to national poverty reduction strategies. The strategies will be country specific and developed through an open, consultative process which is led by national governments. However each will discuss policy options and propose how all resources, not just debt service savings, are used for poverty elimination and the achievement of the international development targets.

22. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will report progress on initiatives to reduce the debt of and poverty in the heavily indebted poor countries. [95601]

Clare Short: Agreement on a substantial revision to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative was reached at the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF at the end of September. The new framework will deliver deeper debt relief, and provide this relief more quickly and to more countries. The debt relief will be strongly focused on supporting poverty reduction strategies. A comprehensive financing package is still being worked out. I made an additional pledge of $50 million towards the costs, bringing the UK's total commitment to $221 million (approx £135 million). We are pressing the European Commission to firm up their proposals to a contribution of at least 1 billion euro. If this is agreed the UK contribution to the trust fund will rise to $400 million.

23. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on the attachment of conditions for debt relief in the case of heavily indebted poor countries. [95602]

Clare Short: I very much welcome the new international consensus that the purpose of debt relief for the heavily indebted poor countries is to allow countries to tackle poverty more effectively. We are extremely pleased that the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in September agreed that the provision of debt relief under the revised Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative should be tied to supporting national poverty reduction strategies.

Mongolia

18. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what development aid her Department provided to Mongolia in 1998–99; what aid it plans to provide in the current year; and if she will make a statement. [95597]

Clare Short: Most UK aid to Mongolia is channelled through multilateral agencies. For 1997, the total UK contribution to Mongolia through multilateral agencies was estimated at £5.7 million . This figure is set to rise slightly over the next two to three years. Figures for our multilateral commitments in 1998 will be available next February.

UK bilateral development assistance totalled £470,000 in 1998–99, including the Small Grants Scheme and support for UK Non Government Organisations' work through the Joint Funding Scheme. Projects include support to street children, provision of basic education services and income generation for households in the poorest provinces of Mongolia.

Kosovo

19. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will estimate the amount spent on aid in Kosovo to date. [95598]

Clare Short: An estimated spending figure for all donors is not yet available. The World Bank is currently collating figures provided by donors in preparation for the Donors' Conference to be held on November 17 in Brussels.

Prior to the end of the air campaign, my Department spent approximately £40 million in humanitarian assistance in response to the crisis. We have committed a further £62 million since the refugees were able to return.

21. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what humanitarian aid is committed for the current year to assist the people of Kosovo. [95600]

Clare Short: Since the end of the air campaign my Department has committed some £62 million in assistance to Kosovo. Our strategy has six strands which have been agreed in consultation with other donors. These include support for the United Nations-led international civil administration; human rights promotion including the provision of objective information and accessible justice for all Kosovars; clearing mines, unexploded ordnance and booby traps; providing relief to returnees and internally displaced people; restoring essential elements of the health system; and supporting emergency rehabilitation to restore essential community and public infrastructure, particularly power and water supplies.

24. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on current assistance to Kosovo. [95603]

Clare Short: Our strategy for assistance to Kosovo has six strands, which have been agreed in consultation with other donors and agencies active in Kosovo. These include support for the United Nations-led international civil administration, both through the provision of personnel and payment of stipends for local public employees. We are supporting the promotion of human rights; this includes the provision of objective information, particularly through support for independent media, and accessible justice for all Kosovars, through funding legal advice centres. We have provided emergency response teams to map and clear mines and unexploded ordnance. We have funded humanitarian agencies to provide relief to returnees. We are restoring essential elements of the health system, including Pristina University Hospital and local clinics. We have established an Emergency Infrastructure Engineering Unit which is helping local authorities to re-establish basic power and water supplies; we are also beginning emergency work on Pristina airport to keep essential supplies coming into Kosovo and enable 24 hour civil air access during the winter months.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the non-military support given in aid to Kosovo by the UK in 1999; and if she will estimate the total UNHCR aid to Kosovo over that period. [96904]

Clare Short: My Department gave £500,000 to United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) in early March 1999 to enable them to respond flexibly to developments in Kosovo and the neighbouring states. In response to the refugee crisis we spent some £39 million in direct operations and in support of agency interventions in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro.

Following NATO entry, my Department has committed some £59 million in assistance to Kosovo. Our strategy has six strands which have been agreed in consultation with other donors. These include support for the United Nations-led international civil administration; human rights promotion including the provision of objective information and accessible justice for all Kosovars; clearing mines, and unexploded ordnance; providing relief to returnees and internally displaced people; restoring essential elements of the health system; and supporting emergency rehabilitation to restore essential community and public infrastructure, particularly power and water supplies. We have recently committed £3 million for work to keep Pristina airport open for civilian air operations through the winter.

UNHCR have appealed for $332.9 million for Kosovo related work in 1999. Figures for their spending in Kosovo itself are not available. The UK has contributed some £5.8 million of in-kind assistance (seconded staff, convoys, airlifts) and $4.4 million in grants to support their activities in Kosovo.

Know-how Fund

25. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what new proposals she has to extend the know-how fund in the Caucasus. [95604]

Clare Short: We have bilateral (Know How) programmes in all three countries of the South Caucasus and we plan to increase the level of our assistance to the region. We have no plans to develop such programmes in the North Caucasus.

St. Helena

26. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects to make an announcement about the provision of an airfield on the island of St: Helena. [95605]

Clare Short: The results of a preliminary study into the technical and regulatory feasibility of establishing air access to St. Helena are currently under consideration. I am aware of the strong lobby for air access but the costs are considerable and obviously not feasible unless the provision of such facilities can provide an economic return.

Poverty Reduction

27. **Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with her colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry on the impact of export credit guarantees on poverty reduction efforts in less-developed countries. [95606]

Clare Short: I have had various informal discussions with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (DTI) on this issue and my Department are participating in the review of ECGD announced by DTI on 27 July. Also in July, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, setting out my views on how ECGD could make a greater contribution to fulfilling the Government's development objectives set out in the White Paper on 'International Development: Eliminating Poverty'.

HIV/AIDS

28. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance the United Kingdom is providing to combat the spread of AIDS in southern Africa. [95607]

Clare Short: We have provided over £40 million in the last five years to countries in southern Africa to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and to deal with its social and economic impacts. We are working with national and regional programmes to promote behaviour change, school and peer education for young people, social marketing of condoms and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases. We are assessing the impact of HIV/AIDS in all of our new programmes in the region and we are including measures to reduce or mitigate the impact of AIDS where possible.

We plan to support the implementation of SADC's regional HIV/AIDS strategy, working with other donors. At national level our programmes include support for the South African National AIDS Control Programme and development of the HIV/AIDS National Plan In Mozambique. In South Africa, support is being provided for a joint Government/Private Sector/Trade Union initiative with mining communities to promote safe sex practices and to deal effectively with sexually transmitted diseases. DFID has funded the production and distribution, throughout South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia, of school materials targeted at 12 to 16 year olds which highlight HIV/AIDS issues. We have just approved a £35 million contribution to support Malawi's sexual and reproductive health programme over six years. My Department is considering new proposals on HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe (up to £15 million over five years), Zambia and Mozambique.

Ghana

29. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on UK aid policy in relation to Ghana. [95608]

Clare Short: Ghana is a major Sub-Saharan country partner for our development programme. The central objective of the Ghanaian Government's development agenda as set out in "Ghana Vision 2020" is to improve the quality of life for all Ghanaians, to generate employment and to reduce poverty. This is consistent with our White Paper commitment to help countries achieve the international development goals.

We provided £26 million in 1997–98 financial year and are providing in the region of £40 million this financial year.

We have provided assistance to help the Government of Ghana meet their development objectives in health, education, water, rural infrastructure, natural resources and forestry, through sector-wide approaches and budgetary and public service reforms.

Sierra Leone

30. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy towards Sierra Leone. [95609]

Clare Short: Britain's policy towards Sierra Leone is directed at building a lasting peace and security and promoting poverty reduction and sustainable development.

For the sake of its beleaguered and war-weary people, we are doing all we can to support the implementation of the peace settlement signed at Lomé on 7 July 1999. Our first priority, in common with the rest of the international community, is to help create security and stability through the urgent implementation of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme. As well as providing humanitarian assistance directly to communities and to the refugees of war we are also providing emergency budgetary support to enable the country meet its debt servicing obligations, a pre-requisite to obtaining IMF and other financial support. My Department is also preparing a development programme which will contribute towards the establishment of effective government, at local and national levels.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the title of research studies, audits and surveys *(a)* being undertaken and *(b)* commissioned by her Department for completion within (i) 1999 and (ii) 2000, stating in each case whether the results are due to be published. [95510]

Clare Short: The number of research studies, audits and surveys being undertaken or commissioned by the Department in 1999 and 2000 is too large to list (at acceptable cost). Research studies are published. Audits and surveys may be for internal purposes in which case

they are not normally published; or they may be carried out on behalf of an overseas government, whose permission would need to be sought for publication.

Angola

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money the United Nations has calculated is necessary to meet current humanitarian needs in Angola; how much has been offered in response to the appeal; and how much the British Government have offered. [96081]

Clare Short: The resumption of fighting in December 1989 in Angola has led to a significant increase in the number of internally displaced and war-affected people. The original requirement of the 1999 UN Appeal for Angola, US$66,665,852, has been revised upwards to US$110,840,321 as the levels of humanitarian need became apparent. As of October 1999, total funds available amounted to US$82,127,986. The UK has committed £1.7 million through UN agencies towards the 1999 UN Appeal and we are also providing some £3.75 million for food aid through WFP. We have also committed a further £1.8 million through international Non Governmental Organisations and the International Committee for the Red Cross in 1999.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people in Angola are calculated to be in need of humanitarian help; and how many people current humanitarian services are reaching. [96082]

Clare Short: The number of internally displaced and people affected by the conflict in Angola has increased significantly since the resumption of fighting in December 1998. According to the United Nations, there are approximately two million people in need of humanitarian relief. In addition the UN estimate that there are three million people living in areas that are inaccessible and whose condition therefore cannot be assessed.

In October, the World Food Programme distributed food aid to a total of 1.12 million people.

Macedonia and Albania

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the progress being made in assisting Macedonia and Albania to recover from the consequences of the war in Kosovo; what specific projects are being funded; and if she will place detailed documents on these matters in the Library. [96083]

Clare Short: We are contributing towards the care and protection needs of remaining refugees in Albania and Macedonia, ensuring that outstanding pledges and promises made to refugee-hosting communities are fully honoured and taking forward pledges of longer term bilateral technical assistance.

For this calendar year, the European Union has a planned expenditure of 56.5 million for Albania and 22.1 million euro for Macedonia. The United Kingdom contributes 15.5 per cent. to the EU budget.

In Macedonia a medium term strategy is being developed. So far we have been developing support centres for small and medium enterprises in the regions of Gostivar, Tetevo and Ohrid; providing advice to the Government of Macedonia on short term budget management, financial planning and accountability issues; and working with the World Bank to develop a longer term programme of reform for public expenditure and institutional structures within the Government. We will be providing training on EU negotiating skills.

In Albania we are supporting the development of rural communities in the north of the country; providing strategic advice to the Albanian Customs Service as part of a wider European Commission programme; supporting the establishment of a network of citizen's advice and information centres; and, in co-operation with the World Bank, working to improve primary health care in the Tirana region. A mission will be undertaken this month to develop future strategy.

We commissioned a study of the post-crisis trade environment in the Balkans, which identified the trade development needs of countries in the region and proposed ways in which these might be met. This study is being placed in the Library. Country strategies will be made available as they are completed.

WALES

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list his engagements for 2, 5, 6, 8, 12 and 13 July; [94041]

(2) if he will list his engagements for 15, 19, 20, 22, 23 and 26 July. [94438]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Prior to my appointment as Secretary of State for Wales, on the dates in question I carried out my duties as Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office.

The former Secretary of State carried out duties in both his capacity as Secretary of State and First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the engagements of the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) and the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) for 2, 5, 6, 8, 12 and 13 July; [94042]

(2) if he will list the engagements of the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) and the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) for 15, 19, 20, 22, 23 and 26 July. [94439]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) attended a Global Cultural Diversity Congress 2000 event on 5 July. On the other dates, he was involved in Government business and constituency responsibilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) attended the Motorsport Industry Awards on 12 July; receptions for Carlton Media, S4C and Unison on 13 July. On the other dates, he was engaged on Government business and constituency responsibilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central undertook official engagements at the Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells on 19 July. On the other days, he was engaged on Government business, or undertook constituency responsibilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath was engaged on Government business and constituency responsibilities on these dates.

Nursing

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives are being pursued to attract more young people into nursing in Wales; and what is the cost of these initiatives. [96253]

Mr. Hanson: The responsibility for recruitment of nurses in Wales rests with the National Assembly for Wales. I understand however that there are currently significant more applications to join the nursing profession in Wales, than there are places available.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [96927]

Mr. Paul Murphy: For any assets which are depreciated, the straight-line method is applied. This method is in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting manual, and the requirements in the Manual are underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15, 'Tangible Fixed Assets'.

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on which Cabinet committees *(a)* he and *(b)* his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State sit. [96987]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information is given in the following list:

Secretary of State

Economic Affairs
Welfare to Work
Productivity and Competitiveness
Environment
Local Government
Better Government
Home and Social Affairs
Legislation
Food Safety
Constitutional Reform Policy
Incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights
Freedom of Information
Devolution Policy
European Issues

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Energy Policy
Biotechnology and Genetic Modification
Health Strategy
Drug Misuse
Women's Issues
Crime Reduction and Youth Justice
Millennium Date Change.

CABINET OFFICE

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to her answer of 26 October 1999 to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney), *Official Report*, column *858*, if she will list those Next Steps agencies operating in Scotland which are not responsible to the Scottish Executive; and if she will list for each such agency the (i) number of civil servants employed in Scotland, (ii) the total wage bill and (iii) the wage bill for staff based in Scotland. [96721]

Marjorie Mowlam: The next steps agencies operating in Scotland which are not responsible to the Scottish Executive are:

Department/Agency	*Staff*[1]
MAFF	
Meat Hygiene Service	169
Veterinary Laboratories Agency	27
Cabinet Office	
Central Office of Information	1
Civil Service College	3
Property Advisers to the Civil Estate	15
Ministry of Defence[1,2,3]	
Army Base Repair Organisation	147
Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency	34
Army Personnel Centre	1,256
Army Training and Recruiting Agency	1,023
Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency	2
Defence Codification Agency	107
Defence Communications Services Agency	75
Defence Dental Agency	55
Defence Estates Organisation	71
Defence Postal and Courier Service Agency	6
Defence Secondary Care Agency	1
Defence Vetting Agency	7
Disposal Sales Agency	3
Medical Supplies Agency	7
Meteorological Office	165
Ministry of Defence Police	860
Naval Bases and Supply Agency	4,016
Naval Recruiting and Training Agency	156
Queen Victoria School	67
RAF Logistics Support Services	5
RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency	3
RAF Signals Engineering Establishment	59
RAF Training Group Defence Agency	81
Ships Support Agency	171
Specialist Procurement Services	71
Department for Education and Employment	
Employment Service	3,740
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions	
Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency	102
Driving Standards Agency	127
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	221
Vehicle Inspectorate	145
Ordnance Survey	52

Department/Agency	Staff[4]
Home Office	
UK Passport Agency	299
Department for Social Security	
Social Security Benefits Agency	6,998
Social Security Child Support Agency	1,291
Department for Trade and Industry	
Companies House	29
Insolvency Service	6
Radiocommunications Agency	12
Employment Tribunals Service	43
Chancellor of the Exchequer	
National Savings	7
Valuation Office	81

[1] As at 1 July 1998, there were 8,448 staff employed in Scotland by executive agencies responsible to the Secretary of State for Defence. This is the last year for which figures are available. The MOD has since restructured and a number of the Agencies mentioned have ceased to exist and other new agencies have been created.

[2] The data cover UK regular forces and UK based permanent civilian personnel counted in official Ministry of Defence civil service figures. Civilian figures are full-time equivalents, where part time staff are counted in proportion to the hours worked.

[3] The data exclude all Defence Evaluation and Research Agency staff and the UK Hydrographic Office on whom reliable data is not available.

[4] Figures are on the basis of full-time equivalents. Casuals are excluded.

Information on the total wage bill and the wage bill for staff based in Scotland is not held centrally.

Joint Cabinet Consultative Committee

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what advice and guidance are given to former members of the Joint Cabinet Consultative Committee concerning disclosures of JCCC deliberations in memoirs. [96745]

Marjorie Mowlam: All members of the JCC are bound, in respect of the proceedings of the Committee, by the recommendations of the Radcliffe Report on Ministerial memoirs.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what is the most recent estimate of the annual cost of servicing the Joint Cabinet Consultative Committee. [96743]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Jack Cunningham) on 1 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *254*.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 3 November. [96613]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Marriage Support Funding

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will announce his formal response to Sir Graham Hart's review of marriage support funding. [96629]

Jane Kennedy: Sir Graham Hart's report on marriage support funding will be published shortly, together with the Lord Chancellor's response.

Tobacco and Alcohol Smuggling

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice his Department gives to licensing magistrates on action to take against clubs, pubs and other licensed premises where smuggled or bootlegged tobacco and alcohol have been sold either by the licensee and staff or by customers. [96645]

Jane Kennedy: The Lord Chancellor's Department has given no advice to licensing magistrates on action to take in the circumstances described. Guidance provided jointly by the Magistrates Association and the Justices' Clerks Society refers generally to the fitness of the applicant for a licence but not specifically to smuggled or bootlegged tobacco and alcohol.

Motoring Offences

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance determines the choice by magistrates of sentences for motoring offences. [96642]

Jane Kennedy: Within the statutory sentencing framework, the nature and severity of the sentences which magistrates impose for motoring offences, as with all offences, are matters for the independent exercise of judicial discretion. Guidance on sentencing in motoring cases exists in the form of judgments by the higher courts and guidelines issued by the Magistrates Association.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what processes are in place to monitor the appropriateness of sentences imposed by magistrates for motoring offences. [96643]

Jane Kennedy: Sentences imposed by magistrates for motoring offences may, as with all offences, be appealed to the Crown Court.

TREASURY

Pensions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the annual pensions liabilities of the European Communities; and what is the projected figure for 2020. [96579]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Appropriations for pensions and severance grants for the institutions of the European Community were 466.8 million euro in 1998, and 501 million euro in 1999.

This includes Retirement pensions, Invalidity pensions, Survivors' pensions and Severance grants.

The EC budgetary authorities have not agreed estimates for 2020.

Von Weizsäcker-Dehaene-Simon Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was (i) to the Communities budget and (ii) to the UK of producing the von Weizsäcker/Dehaene/Simon report to the Commission; who instigated it; what UK assistance was provided; and if he will make a statement. [96578]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Von Weizsäcker/Dehaene/Simon Report is an independent report, produced at the request of the President of the European Commission, Mr. Romano Prodi.

Government Shareholdings

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all shareholdings currently held by Her Majesty's Government, together with an approximate market value for each where this is available. [96403]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information is shown in the table. This shows the nominal values of government shareholdings held at 31 March 1999, as reported to the Treasury, excluding shares held for possible distribution as bonus shares to eligible shareholders. An approximate market value, based on their closing prices on 31 March 1999, is also shown for those of the shares quoted on the London Stock Exchange. This information is not available in other cases, either because the assets held are not marketable or because a market value could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Government shareholdings at 31 March 1999

£

Department/description of holding	*Nominal value*	*Approximate market value*
Ministry of Defence		
AWE Plc: £ Preferential Share	1	n/a
AWE pensions Trustees Ltd.: £1 Preferential Share	1	n/a
British Shipping Federation Ltd.: £1 7.5% Non-Cumulative Irredeemable Preference Shares	55,040	n/a
Chamber of Shipping: £1 7.5% Non-Cumulative Irredeemable Preference Shares	688	n/a
International Military Services Ltd.: Shares at cost	19,999,999	n/a
Royal Dockyard Devonport plc: £1 Preferential Share	1	n/a
Royal Dockyard Rosyth plc: £1 Preferential Share	1	n/a
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions		
BAA: £1 Special Share	1	n/a
Docklands Light Railway: £1 Shares	100	n/a
DoT Share offer (No. 1): £1 Shares	2	n/a
DoT Share offer (No. 2): £1 Shares	2	n/a
Eurostar (UK) Ltd.: £1 Special Share	1	n/a
Intercapital and Regional Rail Ltd.: £1 Special Share	1	n/a
London and Continental Railways Ltd.: 25p Special Shares	1	n/a
Railsale Ltd.: £1 Ordinary Shares	100	n/a
Railtrack Ltd.: 4,087,165 25p Shares	1,021,791	57.8 million
Railtrack Share Offer: £1 Shares	2	n/a
Sealink Stena Line Ltd.: Preference Share	1	n/a
Foreign and Commonwealth Office		
Holding of shares in Chilean schools	4,900	n/a
Calcutta Clinic	268	n/a
Jakarta International School Bond	22,372	n/a
Caracas School	794	n/a
Quito School	8,384	n/a
Santiago School	360	n/a
Home Office		
HM Prison Service holdings: 38,814 Dairy Crest Shares	9,704	105,000
12,771 Genus Shares	1,277	n/a
3,998 National Milk Records Shares	400	n/a
Inland Revenue		
Holdings of miscellaneous foreign bonds and shares in Companies	821,910	n/a
Scottish Office		
West Highlands Crofters and Farmers Ltd.	10	n/a
Department of Trade and Industry		
AEA Technology plc: £1 Special Rights Preference Share	1	n/a
British Aerospace plc: £1 Special Rights Preference Share	1	n/a
British Energy plc:		
£1 Special Shares	1	n/a
£1 Ordinary Shares	5,006,246	29.7 million
British Nuclear Fuels plc: £1 Ordinary Shares	32,668,243	n/a
Cable and Wireless £1 Special Rights Redeemable Preference Share	1	n/a

Government shareholdings at 31 March 1999

£

Department/description of holding	*Nominal value*	*Approximate market value*
National Grid Group plc: £1 Special Rights Redeemable Preference Share	1	n/a
National Power plc: £1 Special Rights Redeemable Preference Share	1	n/a
Nuclear Electric plc: £1 Ordinary Share	1	n/a
PowerGen plc: £1 Special Rights Redeemable Preference Share	1	n/a
Rolls Royce Ltd.: £1 Special Share	1	n/a
United Kingdom Nirex Ltd.: £1 Special Share	1	n/a
HM Treasury		
Bank of England: Capital Stock	14,553,000	n/a
BAA plc: £1 Ordinary Shares	660	4,500
British Airways plc: 120 25p Ordinary Shares	30	500
British Energy:		
Bonds 2003	101,923,000	n/a
Bonds 2006	144,291,000	n/a
Bonds 2016	105,407,000	n/a
British Telecommunications plc: 10,705,164 25p Ordinary Shares	2,676,291	108.2 million
National Power plc: 50p Ordinary Shares	389,381	3.7 million
PowerGen plc: 50p Ordinary Shares	678,710	9.3 million
Railtrack Ltd.:		
Bonds 2006	694,000	n/a
Bonds 2016	516,000	n/a
Scottish Power plc: Bonds 2001	142,000,000	n/a

Tobacco and Alcohol Smuggling

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated loss to the Treasury through smuggled tobacco and alcohol into the United Kingdom in each year since 1997. [96774]

Miss Melanie Johnson: HM Customs and Excise assess the total amount of revenue (excise duty and VAT) losses through all forms of tobacco smuggling in 1998 at about £1.7 billion. There is no comparable assessment for total revenue losses through all forms of alcohol smuggling.

The revenue lost through cross-Channel smuggling of alcohol and tobacco in 1998 is estimated at £220 million and £1 billion respectively. Comparable figures for 1997 are £180 million for alcohol and £790 million for tobacco.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Economic Secretary last met the Head of the Financial Services Authority; and what matters were discussed. [96957]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I meet the Chairman of the Financial Services Authority on a regular basis and discuss a wide range of issues.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97048]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Treasury will be applying straight line depreciation to relevant fixed assets for the current financial year. The Treasury's depreciation methods are in accordance with the Treasury Resource Accounting Manual, which is itself underpinned by the Financial Reporting Standard 15 'Tangible Fixed Assets' issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

Blood-alcohol Limit

Mr. Walter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact on Treasury revenue from excise duty, value added tax and income tax of a reduction in the blood-alcohol limit for drivers. [96903]

Mr. Timms: No such estimate is available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Imports

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to increase the imports of *(a)* food and *(b)* wine from New Zealand and Australia; and if he will make a statement. [96620]

Ms Quin: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans to increase imports of food or wine from any particular country.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage value of the basic state pension *(a)* as a percentage of average earnings and *(b)* in 1999 prices; and what it will be in (i) 2000, (ii) 2010, (iii) 2020, (iv) 2030 and (v) 2050 if it is increased only in line with prices, (1) assuming average earnings continue to grow at the same average rate as they have since 1979 and (2) assuming average earnings increase at 2 per cent. more per year than the retail prices index. [95633]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested is in the table.

Year	*Basic pension in 1999 prices (£)*	*As a percentage of average earnings*
1999	66.75	16.6
2000	66.75	16.3
2010	66.75	13.4
2020	66.75	11.0
2030	66.75	9.0
2050	66.75	6.1

Note:
Real earnings growth when rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent. is the same for (1) and (2) at 2 per cent.

Pensioners (Overseas)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the countries in which UK retirement and other pensions are increased in line with inflation for residents therein and *(b)* those countries where they are not. [96329]

Mr. Rooker: The information is as follows.

Countries where UK state pensions are uprated

Austria
Barbados
Belgium
Bermuda
Channel Islands
Cyprus
Denmark
Finland
France
Germany
Gibraltar
Greece
Iceland
Italy
Israel
Jamaica
Liechtenstein
Luxembourg
Malta
Mauritius
Netherlands
Norway
Philippines
Portugal
Republic of Ireland
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
United Kingdom
United States of America
Yugoslavia (including former members)

Countries where UK state pensions are not uprated

Albania
Algeria
Andorra
Angola
Anguilla
Antigua
Antilles (Netherlands)
Arab Emirates (United)
Argentina
Ascension Island
Australia
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbuda
Belize
Benin
Bhutan
Bissau (Guinea)
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burma
Cameroon
Canada
Cape Verde Islands
Cayman Islands
Chile
China Peoples Republic
Colombia
Congo
Cook Islands
Costa Rica
Cotę D'Ivoire
Cuba
Djibouti
Dominican Commonwealth
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Falkland Islands and Dependants
Faroe Islands
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Guam
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Honduras
Hong Kong
Hungary

India
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kiribati
Kuwait
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Libya
Macau
Malagasy Republic
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldive Islands Mexico
Monaco
Mongolia
Montserrat
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Nevis St Kitts - Nevis
New Caledonia
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Nigeria
Norfolk Island
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Poland
Qatar
Republic of Belarus
Republic of Estonia
Republic of Kazakhstan
Republic of Latvia
Republic of Lithuania
Republic of Uzbekistan
Republic of Yemen
Rumania
Rwanda
Sabah
Samoa
San Marino
Sarawak
Saudia Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
South Korea
Sri Lanka
St Helena and Dependants
St Lucia
St Martins
St Vincent and Grenadines
Sudan
Surinam
Swaziland
Syria
Taiwan
Tanzania
Thailand
The Czech Republic
The Russian Federation
The Slovak Republic
Togo
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turks and Caicos Islands
Tuvalu
Uganda
Ukraine
Uruguay
Vanuatu
Vatican City State
Venezuela
Vietnam
Virgin Islands (British)
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe.

Child Benefit

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children aged *(a)* 0 to five years and *(b)* five or more receive child benefit. [96862]

Angela Eagle: It is estimated that, at May 1999 Child Benefit was in payment in respect of 3,385,860 children aged 0 to four years and 9,431,020 children aged five or more years.

Source:

5 per cent. sample of current live Child Benefit claims.

Exceptional Hardship Payments

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on exceptional hardship payments (housing benefit) in the years 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 in *(a)* the London Borough of Redbridge, *(b)* the London Borough of Newham, *(c)* the London Borough of Havering, *(d)* the London Borough of Waltham Forest and *(e)* the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham; and in relation to exceptional hardship payments in the above years, what was the (i) amount of Government money provided to and (ii) permitted spending totals set for each of the above councils. [96653]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Allocation and expenditure on exceptional hardship payments

£

	Amount of central government contribution	Permitted total	Total expenditure
1996–97			
Barking and Dagenham	41,786	—	2,183
Havering	51,846	—	5,593
Newham	293,611	—	12,863
Redbridge	175,530	—	56,611
Waltham Forest	143,934	—	11,235
1997–98			
Barking and Dagenham	51,935	—	2,776
Havering	52,813	—	17,712
Newham	306,062	—	32,040
Redbridge	177,223	—	125,258
Waltham Forest	179,371	—	33,345
1998–99			
Barking and Dagenham	55,242	137,870	14,599
Havering	57,772	144,183	27,207
Newham	372,294	929,151	37,313
Redbridge	206,547	515,490	119,965
Waltham Forest	244,093	609,193	not available

Notes:

1. The Permitted Totals for the years 1996–97 and 1997–98 were based on a percentage of each local authority's expenditure on rent allowance cases in year, and was not therefore a fixed amount. However, for 1998–99 the Permitted Total was a fixed amount based on 1995–96 expenditure on deregulated tenancies referred to the rent officer.

2. The expenditure figures quoted are based on information provided by the local authorities.

Source:

1996 to 1998–99 Housing Benefit Subsidy claim forms from Local Authorities and the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular S5/99, annex 1.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate, for each of the last five years, the proportion of recipients of Housing Benefit whose gross rent is above the cap set by the rent officer. [96672]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available as no central data exist to give the base for such estimation.

Council Tax (Pensioners)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the modelled average levels of *(a)* gross council tax bills and *(b)* net council tax bills of pensioner households, in (i) 1998–99 and (ii) 1999–2000 which are produced by his Policy Simulation Model. [96673]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Average annual council tax bills of pensioner households from the Department's policy simulation model

£

	Gross council tax bill	Net council tax bill
1998–99	630	470
1999–2000	670	510

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £10.

2. The 1998–99 figures are based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1998–99 prices, benefit levels and caseloads. Council Tax benefit caseloads and average amounts are calibrated to DSS forecasts consistent with the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review.

3. The 1999–2000 figures are based on the 1996–97 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1999–2000 prices, benefit levels and caseloads. Council Tax benefit caseloads and average amounts are calibrated to DSS forecasts consistent with the 1999 Departmental Report.

4. A "pensioner household" is defined as a household containing a person aged 60 or over within the head benefit unit.

5. Gross Council Tax is defined as Council Tax liability for the year, net of any discounts. Net Council Tax is defined as Gross Council Tax net of any Council Tax Benefit payable.

6. Gross Council Tax estimates in the Policy Simulation Model are based on data provided by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions which are then uprated to the relevant policy year using DSS forecasts.

Pensioner Households (Tynemouth)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioner households there are in Tynemouth. [96867]

Mr. Rooker: The administration of Retirement Pension is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Alan Campbell, dated 2 November 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked Mr Mathison to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about how many pensioner households there are in Tynemouth. As Mr Mathison is currently away on leave I am replying.

The information you require is not readily available in the requested format. The database from which the information can be extracted is currently being used in connection with the Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) exercise. To interrupt that exercise at this time could jeopardise payments to customers, which I am sure you will agree is not acceptable.

On completion of the WFP exercise in January 2000, we can obtain the information you seek should you still require it. I would be obliged if you could advise us accordingly.

In the meantime, you may be interested to note the following. The total number of benefit accounts in respect of customers over pension age in North Tyneside, including Tynemouth, is 31,000. The figure includes 6,500 accounts with Income Support interest and relates to individual customers rather than households.

I hope this is helpful.

State Pension

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total expenditure on the state

pension in the United Kingdom and the total expenditure on the state pension in Scotland in the last financial year; and if he will estimate expenditure on this for *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04; [96714]

(2) how many pensioners in the United Kingdom and Scotland are in receipt of the state pension; and if he will estimate the number who will be in receipt of the state pension in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [96715]

Mr. Rooker: Figures for outturn and planned Retirement Pension expenditure and estimated numbers receiving Retirement Pension in respect of Great Britain from 1993–94 to 2001–02 were published in the Departmental Report 1999 (Cm 4214). No estimates are available for 2001–03 and 2003–04.

An estimate of Retirement Pension expenditure and estimated numbers in Scotland for 1998–99 is calculated from administrative data from the Pensioners Strategy Computer System. Similar data are not available for future years.

Such information as is available is in the tables.

Estimated expenditure on pensioners in receipt of retirement pension in Great Britain and Scotland

£ billion

	Great Britain [1]	*Scotland*
1998–99 estimated outturn	35.6	3.0
1999–2000 plans	37.4	n/a
2000–01 plans	38.4	n/a
2001–02 plans	40.2	n/a

[1] Total Retirement Pension (basic element and earnings-related component)

Source:
Table 1 Departmental Report 1999

Estimated numbers of pensioners in receipt of retirement pension in Great Britain and Scotland

Thousand

	Great Britain	*Scotland*
1998–99[1]	10,752	868
1999–2000[2] forecast	10,789	n/a
2000–01[2] forecast	10,884	n/a
2001–02[2] forecast	10,945	n/a

[1] 5 per cent. sample of Pensioners Strategy Computer System as at 31 March 1999
[2] Table 12 Departmental Report 1999

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 4 November 1999

DEFENCE

In-service Dates

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expected in-service dates are for *(a)* the Eurofighter, *(b)* HMS Albion and Bulwark, *(c)* the Future Aircraft Carrier, *(d)* the Bowman communication system and *(e)* the Trigat anti-tank weapon; and if he will make a statement. [94786]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 20 October 1999]*: The in-service date of Eurofighter, which is defined as delivery of the first aircraft, is June 2002.

The in-service dates of HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark are currently planned as March 2002 and March 2003 respectively. We are, however, aware that programme congestion at the shipyard will entail some slippage to these dates. The true extent of the slippage will not be known until Marconi Naval Systems, the contractor, has agreed a revised programme with the Defence Procurement Agency. Initiatives to minimise the slippage are being pursued.

The in-service dates of the Future Aircraft Carriers are planned to be 2012 and 2015.

The in-service date of Bowman is March 2002. The date is, however, under review and I will write to the hon. Member when the review is complete.

The in-service date of Medium Range Trigat is 2005.

UN Standby Arrangement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Ro-Ro ferries referred to in the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the UN standby arrangement system are civilian; and what discussions he has held with civilian operators about them. [95253]

Mr. Hoon: The two Ro-Ro ferries declared as potentially available for operations in the UK's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the UN are run and crewed by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, although the vessels themselves are chartered commercially.

The MOU also reflects plans to increase the number of Ro-Ro ferries to six as a result of enhancements announced in the Strategic Defence Review. My Department is currently evaluating civilian and military options (including a combination of both) for providing this capability.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what units have been notified that they are covered by the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the UN standby arrangement system. [95251]

Mr. Hoon: Individual units have not been specifically notified. The Memorandum of Understanding with the UN under the UN Standby Arrangement System lists a range of forces and capabilities drawn from the pool of Joint Rapid Reaction Forces. The Strategic Defence Review stated that these forces would be available for operations of all kinds across the crisis spectrum and under NATO, Western European Union, UN, OSCE coalition or national auspices.

In the event of a request from the UN for UK military support and ministerial agreement to contribute to a specific peacekeeping operation, the Ministry of Defence will decide how that support can best be provided. The decision on which unit to task from the Joint Rapid Reaction Forces will be based on an assessment of factors such as the nature, duration and location of the operation, and other ongoing commitments.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if troops committed to peacekeeping in East Timor are referred to in the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the UN standby arrangement system. [95252]

Mr. Hoon: The commitment of UK troops to the Australian-led International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) reflects our willingness to support the UN but is not covered by the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the US Standby Arrangements System. This is because the Standby Arrangements are only activated in relation to UN-commanded peacekeeping operations and not for a UN-mandated international force as in the case of East Timor or Kosovo.

Deployment Days (Army)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the average annual deployment days for Army units from 1995 to the last date for which figures are available. [95323]

Mr. Spellar: We do not hold figures for annual deployment days by Army units, and such figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Training (Armed Forces)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the assessed minimum training requirement for operational effectiveness for HM Armed Forces, by trade, over one year's service. [95325]

Mr. Hoon: The Armed Forces include a wide range of trades and specialisations and the necessary amount of training in a year varies accordingly.

Operational commanders at all levels ensure that all the personnel under their command, regardless of trade, are properly trained, in a timely and cost-effective manner, to meet the operational responsibilities and demands placed upon them.

Multi-role Armoured Vehicle

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the contracts for the production of the multi-role armoured vehicle have been signed; what the size of the contract proposed is; and who the partners to the purchase are. [95864]

Mr. Spellar: We expect the contract for the development of the multi-role armoured vehicle to be signed soon. To protect third party commercial confidences, I am withholding information relating to the likely value of the contract under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information until the contract is signed. Our partner in this programme is Germany and we hope that the Netherlands will join as soon as practicable after contract signature.

Landing Platform Helicopter Carrier

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Government have to order another Landing Platform Helicopter Carrier. [96094]

Mr. Hoon: We currently have no requirement for a further Landing Platform Helicopter Carrier.

NATO

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that European partner countries shoulder a proportionate burden of contributions to NATO. [96093]

Mr. Hoon: The achievement of NATO's aims depends on the equitable sharing among all Allies of the roles, risks, and responsibilities, as well as the benefits, of common defence. NATO Defence Planning gives practical effect to this burden sharing. Force goals, which set challenging but realistic targets for each Ally, are designed to ensure that our collective defence arrangements continue to provide for the full range of Alliance missions.

In addition, the development of the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) will enable European Allies to make a more coherent and effective contribution to the missions and activities of the Alliance. This is being taken ahead in step with NATO's Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI), which is designed to ensure that all Allies are able to contribute to NATO's effectiveness. The UK is playing a leading role in both of these initiatives.

European Joint Procurement Structures

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the efficacy of *(a)* European joint procurement structures and *(b)* domestic procurement structures. [96227]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The UK has procurement programmes managed by both the Organisation Conjointe de Co-operation en matier d'Armement (OCCAR) and the NATO Eurofighter and Tornado Management Agency (NETMA), the latter being a NATO agency. Both provide a valuable service in the management of co-operative programmes and we expect to see OCCAR expand its operations next year following achievement of legal status.

As for domestic procurement structures, I have every confidence that the Smart Procurement initiative, together with new Defence Procurement Agency and Defence Logistics Organisation, will match the expectations of the Strategic Defence Review.

BVRAAM Missiles

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what safeguards have been offered to ensure that Britain maintains control over the sale of Raytheon supplied BVRAAM missiles as part of the package with Eurofighter Typhoons to third countries. [96471]

Mr. Hoon: The US Secretary of Defence has given undertakings that the US Department of Defence would support the export of Raytheon supplied BVRAAM missiles as part of the package with Eurofighter to certain countries, and proposed that other sales should be reviewed by a joint US/UK group. In the event of the UK Government selecting the Raytheon proposal for BVRAAM, the details would need to be agreed and incorporated in a Memorandum of Understanding.

Aerospace Company Mergers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect of the DaimlerChrysler Aerospace and Aerospatiale Matra merger on British procurement; and if he will make a statement. [96475]

Mr. Hoon: The proposed merger will be subject to regulatory approval by the European Commission and, as such, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the issue at present. However, the effects of any restructuring by companies in which the UK has an interest are considered very carefully by the Department. Our views are given to the regulatory authorities in confidence at the appropriate time.

Indonesia

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funding the Government are providing to Defence Export Services Organisation in the current financial year in relation to Indonesia. [96587]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The provision relating to DESO representation in Indonesia for the current financial year is £80,000. Other DESO costs relating to Indonesia are not separately identified.

Disposals

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was received from one-off disposals in financial years 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000; and if he will estimate the amount he will raise in financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02. [96656]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The value of disposals achieved in financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99, and the amount forecast for this financial year is set out in the table. It has not been possible to differentiate between the receipts generated through large scale one-off disposals and through rolling disposals programmes for smaller value but larger volume items. Specific estimates for disposals are not available for financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02.

£ million

Financial year	*Value of disposals*
1997–98	224
1998–99	209
1999–2000	[1]30

[1] Estimate

Horse Guards Tattoo

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to continue the tradition of the field gun competition in the proposed Horse Guards Tattoo. [96736]

Mr. Hoon: A Military Tattoo will continue to be held in London from 2001 onwards. Using the spectacular backdrop of Horse Guards Parade, the Tattoo will build on the traditional pageantry that has been such a popular element of the Royal Tournament over the years and a special feature of London in summer.

However we will not continue with the Royal Navy Field Gun competition. In part this is because the event cannot readily be run at Horse Guards Parade due to the surface and the special fixings that are required to meet stringent Health and Safety regulations. But also, the Field Gun competition accounted for more than half of the personnel resources used for the Tournament, some 16,000 personnel-days each year. This could not be justified in the light of operational commitments and the other demands placed on our service personnel.

The Royal Navy is now keen to look to the future and concentrate on supporting events that more accurately reflect the training and operational activities of the Service in the next millennium.

Surface Ship Fuel

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Royal Navy's budget for surface ship fuel in *(a)* the current calendar year and *(b)* the current financial year; and how much of that budget has been spent to date. [96737]

Mr. Spellar: In the current calendar year, the fuel budget for HM warships and RFAs is £27.314 million. Up to 30 September 1999, £20.854 million of this budget had been spent.

In the financial year beginning 1 April 1999, the fuel budget for HM warships and RFAs is £28.424 million. Up to 30 September 1999, £13.7 million of this budget had been spent.

Common Security and Defence Identity

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the WEU Situation Centre and Planning Unit, the WEU Satellite Centre in Torrejon, Spain, and the WEU Institute for Security Studies in Paris will be incorporated into the EU. [96970]

Mr. Hoon: A decision on the structures the EU will need to assume its responsibilities regarding Common Security and Defence policy is not expected until the end of the year 2000—the timeframe agreed at the European Council meeting in June this year.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to create mechanisms to allow the involvement of WEU member states that are not members of the European Union in EU-led operations. [96972]

Mr. Hoon: At the Cologne European Council, Heads of State and Government agreed to develop arrangements to allow all non-EU European Allies to take part to the fullest possible extent in EU-led crisis management operations, building on existing consultation arrangements within the WEU. We are working to develop suitable mechanisms for this purpose.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what he estimates the cost will be to his Department of implementing the conclusions of the Cologne summit on Common Security and Defence Identity. [96969]

Mr. Hoon: The conclusions of the Cologne European Council supported the development of more effective European military capabilities. Our Strategic Defence Review has already produced plans to this end through better targeting of resources. The nature and scale of the structures needed within the EU to support military decision-making have not yet been decided. Their costs are likely to be modest.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97039]

Mr. Spellar: The straight-line method of depreciation will be applied to fixed assets in the preparation of 1999–2000 Departmental Resource Accounts. This method is in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual, which follows, as far as appropriate, private sector accounting practice and standards issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

Smart Procurement Initiative

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the 33 integrated project teams working under the Smart Procurement Initiative; what new teams are currently planned; and if he will make a statement. [95963]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* The programme to implement the Smart Procurement initiative is now well into its transitional year. The roll-out of the Integrated Project Teams (IPTs) in both the Defence Procurement Agency and the Defence Logistics Organisation is continuing and will be complete by April 2000. Thirty-three IPTs are now in full operation; a further 39 formed up in September and 69 are planned to roll-out commencing in January. An updated list of the 141 IPTs has been placed in the Library of the House.

Army Units (Rhine)

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the location of British Army units west of the Rhine. [97603]

Mr. Hoon: A study into accommodation for British Army units west of the Rhine has concluded that the best use of the available estate is to consolidate units on the Rheindahlen Military Complex and on RAF Brüggen. This will enable Ayrshire and Hampshire Barracks in Mönchengladbach; Bradbury Barracks, Krefeld; and Francisca Barracks, St. Tonis to be vacated by the British Army. No significant redeployment of units will take

place before December 2001, and it is expected that the relocation of the units affected and the hand back of the estate to the relevant authorities will be complete by May 2002.

Trident

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to update the Trident warheads; and if he will make a statement. [96630]

Mr. Hoon: The UK has no plans to upgrade or improve the capabilities of our Trident nuclear warheads.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Equal Opportunities Unit (RUC)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when was the most recent tri-annual report of the RUC Equal Opportunities Unit to the Fair Employment Commission; what were its main points; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [94661]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The most recent tri-annual report covering the period 1995–98 was forwarded to the Fair Employment Commission in May 1999.

The main points were as follows:

1. During this review period the actual strength of the RUC Regulars for all categories has remained fairly constant. The trend during the review period is one of a slight increase in CB2 representation from 8.18 per cent. to 8.3 per cent.
2. The workforce was also analysed in terms of length of service and age. Over 60 per cent. of the RUC Regulars fall within the 10–24 years service bands. This grouping had an overall CB2 representation of 7.08 per cent. in 1996, increasing to 7.3 per cent in 1998. By comparison, the 0–9 years service bands, which accounted for approximately 25 per cent. of the RUC, show an increase in CB2 representation from 9.62 per cent. to 9.91 percent. during the review period. Within that grouping, CB2 representation in the 0–4 years service band increased overall from 10.53 per cent. in 1996 to 12.64 per cent. in 1998.
3. The RUC acknowledges the composition of its members is not representative of the community that it seeks to serve. The main catchment area for applicants to the RUC is Northern Ireland. The economically active population with 'A' level qualification, or equivalent, in Northern Ireland is 60.6 per cent. Protestant (CB1) and 39.4 per cent. Roman Catholic (CB2).

The Chief Constable has consistently made it clear that he wishes to see a positive change in the representation of the Force by encouraging members of the minority community to apply for a career in the police service and he has sought the support of respected members of the community in seeking to achieve his aim of

"a more representative police force for Northern Ireland".

There is no obligation under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 to make reviews under section 31 available to any person or organisation. I understand that the review prepared by the Chief Constable in fulfilment of the requirements of the Act, as an internal document, contains information which could prejudice the security of individual officers. It is not appropriate that it be made public.

Nerve Centre, Londonderry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Nerve Centre, Londonderry, was formed; what has been the public funding of the Nerve Centre in each of the past three years; what public funding has been committed to the CD-Rom concerning *(a)* the Battle of the Somme and *(b)* the Bogside Disturbances; and if he will make a statement. [94825]

Mr. McFall: I am advised by the Chief Executive of the Arts Council that the Nerve Centre was first opened in 1989 as an alternative educational initiative aimed at encouraging young people to explore their cultural traditions through multi-media technology.

Public funding of the Nerve Centre through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland was £23,000 in 1996–97, £11,000 in 1997–98, and £11,000 in 1998–99. Funding though the Northern Ireland Film Council was £57,000 in 1997–98 and £57,000 in 1998–99.

I understand that the project 'Symbols' is based on a CD-ROM which includes material on the Battle of the Somme and a number of other historical events including the Bogside disturbances. The project received funding of £150,000 from the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and £50,000 from the Community Relations Council. As the CD-ROM covered a wide range of issues, it is not possible to disaggregate the costs relating to any individual element. The detailed content of the CD-ROM is a matter for the Nerve Centre.

Museums

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the 1998 visitor levels at *(a)* Armagh County Museum, *(b)* the Ulster and Transport Museum, *(c)* the Ulster American Folk Park, *(d)* the Ulster Museum and *(e)* the Navan Centre; for what reason these figures were not published in the 1998–99 Annual report of the Northern Ireland Museums Council; and if he will make a statement. [94815]

Mr. McFall: I am advised by the Northern Ireland Museums Council that the figures provided in the Council's 1998–99 Annual Report refer only to regional, local and independent registered museums within its membership and not to the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland which is directly financed from Government. The Armagh County Museum, the Ulster American Folk Park, the Ulster Museum and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum all form part of National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland which was established on 1 April 1998. The Navan Centre is not included as it is not a Museum.

The 1998 visitor figures were:

Visitor levels at Museums and Galleries in Northern Ireland

Museum	*Number*
Armagh County Museum	[1]14,175
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	169,794
Ulster American Folk Park	111,221
Ulster Museum	235,694
Navan Centre	36,436

[1] The figure for the Armagh County Museum relates to 10 months of 1998 since the Museum was closed for two months in that year.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer of 26 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *17*, what characteristics of the flag flown adjacent to the Royal Ulster Constabulary checkpoint at Garvaghy Road, Portadown indicate that the flag commemorated the formation of the original Ulster Volunteer Force in 1912 and not a proscribed organisation as covered by section 31 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978. [95348]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The flag in question is purple and orange with the name Ulster Volunteer Force and the year 1912 emblazoned on it.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the numbers in the RUC part-time reserve, broken down by district council area. [95889]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* It is not possible to provide the information in the form requested as records are maintained by RUC Sub-divisional area. The following table shows the breakdown of full-time Reserves by Sub-division.

	Number of full-time reserves
'A' Division	
Musgrave Street	80
Donegall Pass	53
Dunmurry	57
Mountpottinger	30
'B' Division	
Grosvenor Road	146
Woodbourne	86
Lisburn	96
'D' Division	
Antrim Road	60
North Queen Street	57
Tennent Street	16
Newtownabbey	37
Carrickfergus	58
Antrim	71
'E' Division	
Strandtown	39
Castlereagh	71
Bangor	96
Stormont	134
'G' Division	
Newtownards	63
Newcastle	43
Downpatrick	43
'H' Division	
Armagh	89
Newry	106
'J' Division	
Portadown	40
Lurgan	41
Banbridge	40
'K' Division	
Cookstown	50
Dungannon	78
'L' Division	
Enniskillen	78
Lisnaskea	61
Omagh	60
'N' Division	
Strand Road	65
Strabane	63
Waterside	51
'O' Division	
Coleraine	49
Limavady	40
Magherafelt	69
'P' Division	
Ballymena	32
Larne	33
Ballymoney	32

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the numbers in the RUC full-time reserve broken down by district council area. [95892]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* It is not possible to provide the information in the form requested as records are maintained by RUC Sub-divisional area. The following table shows the breakdown of part-time Reserves by Sub-division.

	Number of part-time reserves
'A' Division	
Musgrave Street	39
Donegall Pass	39
Dunmurry	40
Mountpottinger	58
'B' Division	
Grosvenor Road	—
Woodbourne	—
Lisburn	40
'D' Division	
Antrim Road	29
North Queen Street	37
Tennent Street	48
Newtownabbey	68
Carrickfergus	40
Antrim	26
'E' Division	
Strandtown	66
Castlereagh	34
Bangor	70
Stormont	—
'G' Division	
Newtownards	101
Newcastle	8
Downpatrick	28
'H' Division	
Armagh	21
Newry	3
'J' Division	
Portadown	19
Lurgan	41
Banbridge	45

	Number of part-time reserves
'K' Division	
Cookstown	9
Dungannon	7
'L' Division	
Enniskillen	30
Lisnaskea	19
Omagh	46
'N' Division	
Strand Road	3
Strabane	11
Waterside	7
'O' Division	
Coleraine	37
Limavady	8
Magherafelt	8
'P' Division	
Ballymena	54
Larne	32
Ballymoney	11

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average length of tenure in the RUC Special Branch. [95895]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* There is no set tenure. The average period of tenure within Special Branch is not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Health and Social Services Pensions

Mrs. McKenna: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the report by the Government Actuary on his investigation of the Health and Personal Social Services Superannuation Scheme in Northern Ireland 1989 to 1994. [97600]

Mr. George Howarth: I have accepted the report and today placed copies in the Library.

The report concludes that it would be prudent to increase the rate of contribution required from employers to meet the scheme's future liabilities. The current rate is 4 per cent. of pensionable pay. The Government Actuary is content with our proposals that the rate should increase 5 per cent. from 1 April 2001, with a further increase to 7 per cent. from 1 April 2003.

The cost of index linking National Health Service pensions is currently met by the Exchequer. As the report notes, the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Finance and Personnel have agreed in principle that the scheme should assume its pensions increase liabilities from 1 April 1994 under a financial restructuring. Officials are discussing the basis of such changes and I will inform the House when final agreement is reached. In the meantime, the Government Actuary considers that the proposed increases in employer contribution rates are consistent with the nature of the changes likely to be required under the restructuring.

Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what targets have been set for the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency for the period 1999–2000. [97601]

Mr. Mandelson: The targets set for the Driver and Vehicle Testing agency for 1999–2000, compared with the equivalent targets for 1998–1999, are as follows:

Description	*Target 1998–99*	*Target 1999–2000*
Vehicle test average appointment waiting times	21 days	21 days
Driving test average appointment waiting times	31 days	30 days
Customer satisfaction with booking arrangements (+/-2 per cent. within sampling error range)	At least 85%	At least 90%
Customer satisfaction with test procedures (+/-2 per cent. within sampling error range)	At least 92%	At least 92%
Compliance by contractor with theory test service delivery standards	At least 92%	At least 92%
Composite unit cost	£16.96	£17.23
Aggregate cost efficiency index	4.5%	2.04%
Return on capital employed	6%	6%

Probation Board Annual Report

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's Annual report for 1998–99. [97602]

Mr. Ingram: The Probation Board's Annual Report for 1998–99 was published today. A copy of the Report has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Equality Commission

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, when he last met representatives of the Equality Commission, they discussed matters relating to the extension of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to incorporate *(a)* further education colleges, *(b)* universities and *(c)* university colleges of education; and if he will make a statement. [96886]

Mr. George Howarth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not yet met representatives of the Equality Commission but hopes to do so shortly. No final decisions have been taken on which additional public authorities in Northern Ireland might be designated under Section 75(3)(d) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Oral Statements

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the reports published by his Department and its associated bodies, *(b)* the reports received from bodies set up by his Department, *(c)* the decisions his Department

has taken and *(d)* events in the UK and elsewhere, since 27 July, which satisfied the criteria he uses for deciding whether to apply to make oral statements to the House when the House is sitting. [93965]

Ms Beverley Hughes: When deciding whether to make an oral statement, Ministers are guided by advice in paragraph 27 of the Ministerial Code. Therefore, I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council on 19 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 429.

Railtrack

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what briefings *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials gave to Sunday newspapers prior to 10 October concerning the future of Railtrack's Safety and Standards Directorate. [95940]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* Following a meeting with the Prime Minister on Saturday 9 October 1999, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made a statement to the media in Downing Street on the Government's response to the Paddington disaster and HSC report into Railtrack's safety regulation role; a copy of the statement has been placed in the Library. Officials provided similar information to Sunday newspapers on request.

A27 (Worthing)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much he has allocated to the improvement and to the maintenance of the A27 in Worthing for the next three financial years. [96327]

Mr. Hill: As this is an operational matter and the responsibility of the Highways Agency, I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 4 November 1999:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your question about funding for the maintenance and improvement of the A27 in Worthing over the next three financial years.

The attached schedule sets out our proposals for maintenance and improvement works for the A27 through the Borough of Worthing for the next three years. Progress with these proposals will depend upon the priorities assigned to each project within the Agency's detailed business planning process.

Additionally, with the Government Office for the South East, we are carrying out several studies into transport issues in the Worthing area that may identify further improvements to the A27.

A27 Worthing Programme of Works 1999 to 2003

Financial year	*Description*	*Cost*
Maintenance works		
2000–2001	A27 Sompting Bypass Major Maintenance	£3.68m
Improvements		
2000–2001	A27 Worthing and Lancing Lighting	£500k
2000–2001	A27 Worthing low cost safety schemes	£50k
1999–2000	A27 Puffin Crossing (Nr. Hayling Rise)	£35k

In addition, there will be on going routine maintenance work such as sign cleaning, drainage and lighting repairs together with minor carriageway and footpath repairs (if required).

Allotments

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list all local authority allotments he has approved for closure since 1997; and how many applications for closure he has refused. [96872]

Ms Armstrong: The Secretary of State has given consent for the disposal of 172 statutory allotment sites since 1 January 1997. The information requested has been placed in the House Library. There have been two applications for disposal which have been declined since that date.

Eurostar

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he has made with the study into Regional Eurostar Services; and if he will make a statement. [96621]

Mr. Hill: The review commissioned by the Government is currently on-going. The results are expected soon, at which time I will make a statement.

Council Tax (Pensioners)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the average increase in *(a)* gross council tax bills and *(b)* net council tax bills of pensioner households between 1998–99 and 1999–2000. [96674]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Department does not hold administrative data on council tax bills by pensioner and non-pensioner households from which the average increase in gross and net council tax bills of pensioner households between 1998–99 and 1999–2000 could be estimated. The latest information from the Family Resources Survey on pensioner households relates to 1997–98.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate, based on his Department's administrative data for each of the last 10 financial years, the average level of *(a)* gross council tax bills and *(b)* net council tax bills expressed as a percentage of household income, for the whole population, and separately for pensioner and non-pensioner households. [96675]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Department does not hold administrative data on household incomes, nor on council tax bills by pensioner and non-pensioner households.

Rail Safety

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what date in August *(a)* he and *(b)* his Department's officials first saw the Signals Passed at Danger statistics for 1998–99. [96680]

Mr. Hill: Ministers were informed in a submission from the Chief Inspector of Railways dated 9 August 1999. HSE first sent officials of an early draft of these statistics on 22 June 1999.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many times each signal on routes into London mainline stations via Clapham Junction and Norwood Junction involving stops at Cheam or Sutton stations was passed at danger in each of the last five years. [96072]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The Railways Inspectorate do not hold information in this form. I will ask the chair of the Health and Safety Executive to write to the hon. Member with what information they do hold. A copy will be placed in the House Libraries.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will place the weekly reports he receives on signals passed at danger on the railway in the Library as soon as he receives them; and on what day of the week they will regularly appear; [97084]

(2) if he will produce a table of railway signals passed at danger for each week since 5 October, showing the split between each category of SPAD. [97086]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said to the House on 19 October 1999, information on signal passes at danger will be made available to the House on a monthly basis.

A published first analysis by the Health and Safety Executive's Railways Inspectorate will be available early November in the House of Commons and House of Lords Libraries.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many incidents of signals passed at danger have occurred on the main line between London Liverpool Street and Ipswich in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement; [97090]

(2) how many incidents of signals passed at danger have occurred on the main line between London Liverpool Street and Southminster in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [97089]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* This information is not available in the form requested. The Health and Safety Executive will write to the hon. Member with what information they do hold. A copy of the letter will be placed in the House Libraries.

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the performance of train operating companies with regard to their contractual obligations of maintenance and standards of safety when considering requests to extend franchises; and if he will make a statement. [96930]

Mr. Hill: I can confirm that the Deputy Prime Minister's instruction to the franchising director require him to maintain effective liaison with other authorities, including the Rail Regulator and the Health and Safety Executive, in the conduct of his business. The franchising director will be expected to consult other authorities prior to making recommendations to Ministers concerning the extension of franchises.

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the train operating companies that have requested an extension of their franchise; and if he will make a statement. [96931]

Mr. Hill: The bids received by the franchising director are commercially confidential and I am therefore unable to list them.

Airbags

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has carried out in the last five years regarding the effects of airbags in reducing casualties and fatalities in car accidents; and if he will make a statement. [96933]

Mr. Hill: Between 1993 and 1996, the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) investigated airbag effectiveness at the Department's request. This included a review of published research on airbag testing and performance in the field. By necessity, this was based mainly on the experience in the US, where airbags have been in use for a number of years. TRL also looked at a sample of accidents in the UK, but the number available for examination was small and there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion on the efficacy of airbags in cars in the UK.

The Department, in collaboration with the motor industry, is actively involved in the Co-operative Crash Injury Study (CCIS), which collects detailed information on many aspects of crash protection from a sample of UK road accidents. CCIS is an ongoing study managed by the TRL and involving teams from Birmingham University, Loughborough University and the Vehicle Inspectorate. A study of available CCIS data by Loughborough University published in 1998 concluded that, of all the injured drivers they looked at, those in airbag equipped vehicles had less head injuries, but more arm injuries, than those in vehicles without airbags.

The relatively low number of cases involving airbag deployment is still a constraint in assessing the effectiveness of airbags. However, we anticipate that a clearer picture will begin to emerge as the number of CCIS investigations involving airbag equipped vehicles increases.

Planning Guidance

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from supermarket companies on PPG6. [96967]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Secretary of State has received a number of representations from the retail sector. All have been sympathetic to the Government's objective for PPG6 which is to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend Planning Policy Guidance Note 6. [96974]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have no plans to amend PPG6.

South Downs National Park

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received following the announcement of his intention to turn the South Downs into a national park. [96934]

Mr. Mullin: Since my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 29 September that he was asking the Countryside Agency to consider designation of the South Downs as a National Park, Ministers have received a small number of written representations. Those from members of the public have generally been supportive of a National Park. On 12 October I met a delegation of MPs and local authority representatives from East and West Sussex and Hampshire. I took the opportunity to reassure them that the Countryside Agency and the Government would listen to local interests and take into account all the special factors in the South Downs in considering possible models for a National Park.

Local Government (Organisation and Standards) Bill

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he expects to respond to the report of the Joint Committee on the draft Local Government (Organisation and Standards) Bill; [96963]

(2) when he expects to publish the latest version of the Local Government (Organisation and Standards) Bill. [96962]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The draft Local Government (Organisation and Standards) Bill was published earlier this year as part of a consultation exercise to seek the views of local authorities and interested members of the public and to provide the opportunity for pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of Members of both Houses of Parliament. The Joint Committee published its report at the beginning of August.

We have no intention to publish a further version of the draft Bill; the next stage would be for the Government to introduce primary legislation to Parliament. A response to the Joint Committee report would accompany the introduction of the legislation. My Department hopes to bring forward the legislation at an early opportunity.

Building Safety

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if Birmingham City Council has complied with his circular 62/68 in respect of building safety. [96961]

Ms Beverley Hughes: For new building work compliance with the Building Regulations 1991 is mandatory, and any new buildings such as those addressed by Circular 62–68 would be sufficiently robust to resist disproportionate collapse. The guidance in the Circular is not mandatory, although it impressed most strongly on local authorities the need to put any necessary work in hand urgently. However, while strongly endorsing the guidance in this Circular and in Circular 71–68 which followed it, the Department does not monitor the performance of local authorities with regard to advice in Circulars.

Motorways and Trunk Roads

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each location on the motorway and trunk road network in England where *(a)* there is currently a weight restriction below the normal permitted maximum and *(b)* where the Highways Agency is undertaking monitoring because of concerns about the strength of a structure. [97070]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Peter Nutt, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 4 November 1999:

You recently asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for information concerning weight restrictions and monitoring of structures on the motorway and trunk road network.

There are no weight restrictions currently in force on the main carriageways of motorways and major trunk roads. However, there are a small number of structures, primarily supporting slip roads and interchanges, which have some form of weight restriction pending repairs or strengthening. The numbers and restrictions can vary as repairs and strengthening takes place but I am preparing an up to date list for you.

You also ask for a list of where the Highways Agency is undertaking monitoring because of concerns about the strength of a structure. Special monitoring of structures is being undertaken for a number of reasons on a number of bridges. This can vary from week to week and the details are not held centrally. I am assembling the information you request and shall write to you shortly listing those structures subject to weight restriction as well as those where special monitoring is being undertaken because of concerns about strength.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will instruct the inspector at the public inquiry on the future policy of waste disposal in Essex, currently being held at Chelmsford, immediately to make the written submissions to that inquiry available to the press and interested local parties. [97130]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I see no need to. Copies of written submissions made to public inquiries on Waste Local Plans are deposited with those plans as a matter of standard practice so that others may see them, both before and during an inquiry.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy towards publishing written submissions by interested parties prior to the holding of a public inquiry into local waste disposal projects. [97131]

Ms Beverley Hughes: It is standard practice for the written submissions of interested parties to be deposited with Waste Local Plans so that others may see them, during reasonable hours, both before and during a public inquiry.

Endocrine Disruption

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what provision has been made for the co-ordination of Government-funded research in the UK on endocrine disruption. [97535]

Mr. Meacher: Government-funded research in the UK on endocrine disruption is co-ordinated by an interdepartmental group comprising representatives from Government Departments, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales, the environment agencies, Research Councils and the Health and Safety Executive. I am pleased to announce the publication of the Group's first report on its activities since its inception in 1995 and I will place copies in the House Library.

Tree Planting

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the sources of funding available to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* voluntary organisations to support the planting of trees. [97033]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme provides grants for planting trees, for creating woods, and for managing woods. These grants are available to local authorities, voluntary organisations, individuals and other bodies. Grants and other funds to support tree planting are also provided by several other organisations such as the Countryside Agency, English Nature, the Environmental Action Fund, the Tree Council, the National Lottery, trusts, charities and private companies. Many local authorities themselves also offer grants for tree planting.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list all performance targets set for her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94988]

Clare Short: All of the performance targets set for my Department since May 1997 are listed in the Public Services Agreement.

These high-level targets are supported at operational level by numerous targets to ensure delivery by individual units. Listing these operational targets would be inappropriate and disproportionate in terms of resources.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the President of the Council (1) what methods of depreciation her Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets; [97042]

(2) if she will list the methods of depreciation her Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [96912]

Mrs. Beckett: My Department will apply the straight line method. This is in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual. The requirements in the Manual will be underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15, "Tangible Fixed Assets", issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

Office Costs Allowance

Mr. Love: To ask the President of the Council how many hon. Members *(a)* underspent, *(b)* spent and *(c)* overspent their office costs allowance in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [93551]

Mrs. Beckett: I regret that the information requested is not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Accounting

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what methods of depreciation the Lord Chancellor's Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97045]

Jane Kennedy: The Lord Chancellor's Department will use the Straight-Line method of depreciation in the preparation of departmental resource accounts for 1999–2000. This is in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual, which is in turn underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15 'Tangible Fixed Assets', as issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burma

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the human rights situation in Myanmar. [97053]

Mr. Battle: Human rights violations in Burma are appalling and include arbitrary killings, rape, torture, forced labour, forced relocations and denial of freedoms of expression, movement, assembly and association. We take every opportunity to raise our concern about the violations of human rights, especially those of ethnic minorities. For example, our Embassy in Rangoon regularly raise particular concerns with the regime; visiting British and EU officials also raise such concerns when they visit Burma; we have co-sponsored United Nations resolutions which strongly condemn the human rights violations and call on the regime to take urgent action to improve the situation. We will continue our efforts.

Food and Drug Administration

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to propose to the Council of Ministers the establishment of an equivalent agency to the United States Food and Drug Administration within the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [96923]

Mr. Vaz: The President of the European Commission, Mr. Prodi, has already said that he intends to bring forward options for an EU food agency in a White Paper expected in December. We are interested in pursuing ideas for such an Agency and we look forward to participating fully in discussions of Mr. Prodi's proposals.

EU Charter Working Group

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the list of already appointed members of the EU's Charter Working Group and the names of other members on appointment. [97154]

Mr. Vaz: Heads of State and Government at the Special European Council in Tampere on 15–16 October agreed that the drafting body would be made up of 15 representatives of Heads of Government, 1 representative of the Commission, 16 Members of the EP and 30 national Parliamentarians. As of 3 November, the only appointments that have been made so far are ex-President Herzog (Germany), Paavu Nikula (Finland) and Stelios Perrakis (Greece).

Chinese President (State Visit)

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) of 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *993*, how many meetings between his Department's officials and the Metropolitan Police took place; on what dates; who was present at each meeting; for what reasons no minutes were taken at any of these meetings; if, as a result of these meetings, letters or memos were sent by his Department's officials to the police or vice versa; and who represented the police at these meetings. [97259]

Mr. Battle: Meetings involving Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials and the Metropolitan Police took place on the following dates this year: 13 July, 27 and 29 July (during the first preparatory visit to the UK of the Chinese officials responsible for the Visit), 6 and 8 September (during the second preparatory visit to the UK of the Chinese officials responsible for the Visit), 23 September, 28 September and 13 October. The number of meetings reflected the programme requirements.

At each meeting, there were representatives from among the following: China Hong Kong Department, Protocol Division and Conference and Visits Group of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Buckingham Palace; Central Area Headquarters, Special Branch, Royalty Protection and Special Escort Group of the Metropolitan Police Service; the Chinese Embassy and visiting Chinese officials; Cambridge University; Cambridgeshire Constabulary; Guildhall; City of London Police; Royal Parks; Royal Parks Police; British Transport Police; Gatwick Airport; Gatwick Airport Police; Sussex Police; Lothian and Borders Police; Royal Air Force; Household Cavalry; Royal Logistic Corps; Ministry of Defence; Railtrack Southern; English, Welsh and Scottish Railway; E. C. Harris company.

Minutes were not taken because the purpose of these meetings was not to take operational decisions, but to go through successive drafts of the programme and discuss new programme proposals. Any outcome of the discussions was subsequently reflected in revised programmes.

No letters or memos were sent by Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials to the police as a result of these meetings, or vice versa.

Hungarian President (State Visit)

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings took place between his Department's officials and the Metropolitan Police in preparation for the state visit of the President of Hungary in June; on what dates; who represented the police at these meetings; and if minutes were taken. [97254]

Mr. Vaz: Meetings involving Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials and the Metropolitan Police took place on the following dates this year: 8 April, 4 and 6 May (during the preparatory visit to the UK of the Hungarian officials responsible for the Visit), and 11 May. The number of meetings reflected the programme requirements.

At each meeting, there were representatives from among the following: the then Central European Department and the then Protocol Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; the then Government Hospitality Fund; Department of Trade and Industry; Buckingham Palace; Central Area Headquarters, Special Branch, Royalty Protection and Special Escort Group of the Metropolitan Police Service; the Hungarian Embassy and visiting Hungarian officials; Windsor Castle and Windsor Great Park; Thames Valley Police; Guildhall; City of London Police; Royal Parks Police; Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead; Heathrow Airport; Gatwick Airport; Department of Culture, Media and Sport; Royal Air Force; Household Cavalry; Royal Logistic Corps; Ministry of Defence; Crown Estate Office; E. C. Harris company.

Minutes were not taken because the purpose of these meetings was not to take operational decisions, but to go through successive drafts of the programme and discuss new programme proposals. Any outcome of the discussions was subsequently reflected in revised programmes.

Iran

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Iranian Government concerning the trial of the students charged with insulting the Imam; when and at what level such representations were made; what assurances were received; and if he will make a statement. [95783]

Mr. Hain: The Iranian Government are fully aware of the importance that we and our EU partners attach to freedom of expression. Our concerns about Iran's human

rights record, including on freedom of expression, will again feature prominently in this month's EU sponsored UN Resolution on Human Rights in Iran.

Transfrontier Co-operation

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the United Kingdom has not signed the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities; when the Convention was opened for signature; how many nations have signed this convention; and if he will make a statement. [96474]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

The European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities was opened for signature on 21 May 1980 and to date has been signed by 32 member states of the Council of Europe.

United Kingdom local authorities have entered into a number of transfrontier arrangements with local and regional authorities in other states, which the Government strongly welcomes. None of these arrangements to date have needed to be underpinned by the Convention.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

E-commerce

11. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that future legislation on electronic commerce is able to cope with evolving technology. [95833]

Ms Hewitt: The Electronic Communications Bill, which will be introduced into Parliament in the next Session, is intended to be technology neutral. Firstly, it will start the process of ensuring that electronic transactions are given the same legal status as paper ones. Secondly it will establish a flexible legal framework which is capable of adapting to different ways of doing electronic commerce and different methods of ensuring authentication, integrity and confidentiality of information. Our policies are designed to increase our competitiveness by promoting electronic commerce, not a particular technology.

24. **Dr. George Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the development of electronic commerce in the UK; and what steps he is taking to ensure that the UK is the best place in the world for such commerce. [95848]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), *Official Report*, column 463.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the European Commission about the regulation of e-commerce; and if he will make a statement. [95831]

Ms Hewitt: On 12 October I had a meeting in Brussels with Erkki Liikanen, Commissioner for Enterprise and the Information Society. We discussed and agreed on the need for a market-led regulatory framework for electronic commerce; the actual and potential contribution of e-commerce to competitiveness in Europe, particularly that of SMEs; and the importance of ensuring close co-ordination of e-commerce related initiatives.

Onwa Ltd.

12. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to provide special assistance to employees of Onwa Ltd. in Jarrow. [95834]

Mr. Caborn: I have no such plans as it is not the responsibility of my Department to provide assistance to employees in such cases.

However, I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment that his Department has designated the closure as a large scale redundancy, and that all employees will be eligible for immediate entry to the Department's work-based learning for adults programme. I also understand that his Department is considering a rapid response fund assistance package of up to £153,000, which will provide further help to the Onwa workers in obtaining retraining.

Low Income Families

13. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effects of his Department's policies on families with low incomes in the last two years. [95835]

Mr. Byers: This Government believe that rewarding work is a key aspect of our agenda of modernisation and reform. The national minimum wage, coupled with the introduction of the working families tax credit, will make work pay for hard-working parents.

Fireworks (Safety)

15. **Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has for reducing firework-related injuries. [95838]

Dr. Howells: The comprehensive measures introduced under the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 are again being supplemented by a robust, targeted firework safety campaign. This approach has been shown to work. During the 1998 firework season, 831 people were treated in A&E departments compared to 908 in 1997 and 1233 in 1996.

The theme of this year's campaign, which I launched on 15 October, is that alcohol and fireworks do not mix. As part of the campaign, 1,000 information packs to help mount local safety campaigns have been distributed to trading standards, fire brigades, environmental health officers and for the first time, police forces.

Energy Efficiency

16. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to monitor the efficiency of the use of energy by manufacturing industry. [95839]

Mrs. Liddell: Government monitor the energy efficiency performance of manufacturing industry through the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Region's Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme and

related work. This Programme has stimulated annual energy savings of around 150 petajoules in industry, equivalent to 3 million tonnes of carbon.

Consumer Protection

18. **Mr. Truswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to increase the protection of consumers against dishonest traders. [95841]

Dr. Howells: The White Paper "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers" published in July set out our proposals to introduce much clearer targeting of dishonest traders and specific unfair trade practices by amending the Fair Trading Act 1973. In particular, we intend to provide a power for the courts to grant injunctions against specified practices carried out by specified traders, a power for the courts to ban from trading for a period traders with a history of disregarding their legal obligations, and a power to make orders by secondary legislation to specify that certain unfair practices should become criminal offences.

European Economic Area

19. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet World Trade Organisation officials to discuss free trade within the European Economic Area. [95842]

Mr. Caborn: We have no plans to meet WTO officials to discuss free trade within the European Economic Area (EEA). This is not a matter for the WTO, but is primarily one for discussion by EEA members.

Car Prices

20. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the prices of new cars in the UK and in the rest of the EU. [95843]

Dr. Howells: The European Commission publishes a six-monthly comparison of pre-tax car prices across the European Community. The most recent one covered prices at 1 May this year; the UK was the most expensive market for 62 of the 75 models covered.

The Competition Commission is looking into new car prices in the UK and has been asked to report by 16 December. The Secretary of State will decide what action to take in the light of any adverse findings the Commission may make. We await the Commission's report with interest.

Trade Agreement (South Africa)

21. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress with the trade agreement between the EU and South Africa. [95844]

Mr. Caborn: The Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement between the European Union and South Africa was signed in Pretoria on 11 October. The key trade provisions of the Agreement will be implemented from 1 January 2000. Reciprocal free trade will be phased in over 12 years. Of the two partners, the EU will open its import market at a generally faster pace in order to give a boost to South Africa's further integration into the global economy. The EU is South Africa's major trading partner and this agreement will strengthen that relationship and create new opportunities for British companies to do business with South Africa.

Climate Change Levy

22. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received on the proposed climate change levy. [95845]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have had many representations from business about the proposed climate change levy and accompanying reduction in employers' National Insurance contributions which were announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his last Budget. We will be taking account of the views of business in designing the details of the levy so that the environmental benefits can be achieved while safeguarding competitiveness.

23. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effect of the climate change levy on manufacturing competitiveness. [95847]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have said it aims to design the levy in a way which maximises its environmental effectiveness while safeguarding competitiveness. We have therefore been developing our understanding of the perspectives of different sectors of Industry to inform our decisions on the levy for the Finance Bill 2000.

World Trade Organisation

25. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he will take to ensure that consideration is given to environmental protection and sustainable development at the Seattle round of the WTO. [95849]

Mr. Caborn: The UK and EU are committed to ensuring that sustainable development is a key objective for the new round and that the relationship between trade and the environment is included as a subject of negotiations.

26. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the EU position in respect of the WTO negotiations. [95850]

Mr. Caborn: The UK's and EU's priority for the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle later this year is to secure the launch of an ambitious, comprehensive round of negotiations aimed at a substantial package to remove trade barriers and so promote growth and jobs in the world economy. Our particular priorities for these negotiations include agriculture, services, industrial tariffs, regulatory standards, trade facilitation, government procurement, intellectual property rights, investment, competition and the environment. Throughout the round we shall want to ensure that the interests of developing countries are taken fully into account. The EU's position for Seattle was discussed at an informal meeting of EU Trade Ministers on 1 October in Florence and at the General Affairs Council on 11 October. Formal Council Conclusions were agreed on 26 October.

Balkans

27. **Ms Kelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he has taken to encourage British firms to take part in the regeneration of the Kosovo and other Balkan economies. [95851]

Mr. Caborn: On the initiative of the Secretary of State, a joint Government/private sector Taskforce was set up by British Trade International—the recently established joint DTI/FCO trade promotion organisation—to co-ordinate and promote the UK's response to the reconstruction opportunities arising in Kosovo. Its prime objective is to ensure that UK companies are well placed to play a role in the rebuilding of Kosovo. The Taskforce has achieved much. Arising out of its activities, a consortium of UK companies has, with financial support from British Trade International, been awarded the concession to manage the power sector over the next seven months; this will help ensure that there is sufficient power to enable the people of Kosovo to get through the forthcoming harsh winter. It was clear from my recent visit to Kosovo that the good will arising out of this contract should help UK companies compete for other business, not only in the power sector but also in other areas of activity.

British Trade International have seconded an official to the British Office in Pristina to assist UK companies seeking business in Kosovo. In order to keep the business community abreast of developments in Kosovo, the Department has also established a Kosovo website; its address is: www.brittrade.com/kosovo/. This includes information on the activities of the Taskforce and the international funding agencies working there. The well publicised activities of the Taskforce have played a major role in generating UK company interest in Kosovo; nearly 1,000 companies have registered on British Trade International's Kosovo database. British Trade International has been praised widely by the private sector for all its initiatives on Kosovo. Kosovo has been its first test; one which it has come through with flying colours.

Kosovo is seen as the springboard to the wider South East Europe region (the Balkans) which presents significantly more business opportunities. In due course, the role of the Taskforce is likely to focus on this wider region. Through promotional events such as a seminars support for trade fairs and missions, British Trade International continues to draw the attention of UK companies to commercial opportunities in the other markets of the region.

Loose from Bulk Goods

28. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department has taken to extend the derogation for loose from bulk goods in imperial measures. [95852]

Dr. Howells: On 26 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns 678–79, I announced the result of our reappraisal of the use of metric units of measurement in the UK and placed a copy of the report in the Library of the House. As that report made clear, we have concluded that there would be no benefit in seeking a postponement of the date (31 December 1999), agreed by the previous administration, after which loose from bulk goods should be priced and weighed in grams and kilograms. It will still be possible for retailers to indicate imperial units alongside metric and for consumers to express in imperial units the quantity they wish to buy.

Global Free Trade

29. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's policy on encouraging global free trade. [95853]

Mr. Caborn: The United Kingdom supports the launch of an ambitious, comprehensive round of negotiations aimed at a substantial package to remove trade barriers and so promote growth in the world economy and jobs for our people. This should go a long way to realising global free trade consistent with the principle of sustainable development.

Science

30. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to ensure an increase in the Government's total spending on science. [95854]

Ms Hewitt: This Government have shown a clear commitment to science in their spending plans agreed following the Comprehensive Spending Review. In this three-year period, Government will invest over £20 billion in science, engineering and technology. This level of investment is higher in real terms than at any time this decade.

National Minimum Wage

31. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on enforcement of the national minimum wage. [95855]

Mr. Alan Johnson: We are confident we have put in place one of the world's most professional and organised systems of minimum wage enforcement. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Ms Russell) below.

36. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to prevent employers from ignoring the national minimum wage. [95860]

Mr. Alan Johnson: National Minimum Wage (NMW) Inspectors have dealt with over 3,000 cases of suspected underpayment of the minimum wage. Every call is followed up, including anonymous calls and third party tip-offs. In addition, Inspectors are now targeting low paying employers based on detailed risk analysis. Changes to the law mean that our Inspectors are now able to use information gathered for income tax, NI and Working Families Tax Credit purposes.

The Government recognise that it is vital that employers are aware of their obligations under the law. In January this year the Inland Revenue included information about the NMW in their employer's annual pack, which was sent to all 1.2 million tax-registered employers. In March, once the Regulations had been approved by Parliament, we made detailed guidance available, along with leaflets for employers and employees. So far over

1 million copies of the guidance and leaflets have been sent out to individuals and organisations, as well as many thousands which have been downloaded from the minimum wage website.

Around £5 million was spent on advertising the minimum wage in March and April. Independent research shows the campaign met or exceeded the targets set; awareness of the minimum wage following advertising peaked at 95 per cent. among employers.

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of the National Minimum Wage. [97578]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government have asked the Low Pay Commission to monitor and evaluate the introduction and impact of the national minimum wage. The Commission have undertaken a wide-ranging consultation and fact-finding exercise and have commissioned a series of research projects.

We have submitted and published our own evidence to the Low Pay Commission.

International Postal Services

32. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when *(a)* he and *(b)* officials in his Department last met representatives of the Post Office to discuss international postal services. [95856]

Mr. Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regularly meet with the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Post Office to discuss a range of issues, including international postal matters. Officials also regularly discuss international postal matters with the Post Office.

Incubator Companies

33. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what success he has had in developing incubator companies of clusters. [95857]

Ms Hewitt: My Department supports the UK Business Incubation Centre (UKBI), which promotes and encourages the uptake of business incubation, spreads best practice and improves networking and coordination between incubators. DTI also supports some sectoral incubation activities, for example through the Biotechnology Mentoring and Incubator Challenge and the Software Business Incubator (a virtual incubator). In addition, the "Reach-Out" fund has invited proposals for enhanced interaction between Higher Education Institutions and business, including support for university-based incubator facilities. Business incubators are often but not exclusively, located within industrial clusters.

UKBI have commissioned a study, part-funded by my Department, which will help identify where and how incubator support policy has assisted specific firms, such as high-technology businesses We await the result of this study with interest.

Part-time Work Directive

34. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the draft regulations and code of practice to implement the directive on part-time work. [95858]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The draft regulations and Code of Practice will be published in early November. This will launch a consultation process on the Government proposals. We intend to implement the Directive in April next year.

Energy Markets

35. **Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to secure the liberalisation of energy markets in the UK. [95859]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government are currently undertaking a major programme of liberalisation in the energy markets as outlined in the White Paper on energy sources for power generation (Cm 4071) in October 1998. This has included the opening up to competition of the UK gas supply market (completed in May 1998) and the UK electricity supply market (completed in May 1999). Work is also under way in my Department and in the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets to liberalise the gas and electricity wholesale trading arrangements and transmission capacity allocation.

Regional Selective Assistance

37. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the implementation of the changes to the regional selective assistance map and associated issues indicated in his July statement; and if the proposed changes have been ratified by the European Commission. [95861]

Mr. Caborn: No.

Intellectual Property

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is introducing to clarify the ownership of intellectual property. [95836]

Dr. Howells: In general, intellectual property legislation provides for creators, such as inventors in the case of patents and authors for copyright, to be the first owners of rights.

Intellectual property may be transferred by assignment or vested by operation of law (as on death or bankruptcy) in the same way as other personal property. It is not for government to become involved in such acquisition, disposal or transfer. However, we shall continue to work to ensure that clarity of ownership of intellectual property in the public sector encourages and simplifies exploitation of research in universities and public sector research establishments.

BVRAAM UK

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the impact on employment in the UK if the European Meteor team loses their bid in the BVRAAM UK competition. [95456]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Beyond Visual Range Air to Air Missile (BVRAAM) competition is being run by the Ministry of Defence, with the Department of Trade and Industry being involved in the consideration of the industrial implications of the procurement. It would be inappropriate to publish material derived from information provided by companies to both MOD and

DTI as part of a competitive bidding process. Our assessment considers the impact of the competing bids on the development of significant industrial and technological capabilities in the UK. The impact on employment levels in the UK is only one element of this.

Advertisements

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his policy is regarding EU Directive 97/55/EC on comparative advertisements; and if he will make a statement. [95922]

Dr. Howells: Advertising which compares a company's product with those of a competitor has always been accepted in the UK. A system of regulatory and voluntary controls ensures that any comparison is accurate and fair so that consumers are able to judge the relative merits of products. However, it is important that there is a level playing field across Europe for those who wish to advertise by objectively comparing their products with those of a competitor. At present, this does not exist because of different regulations across the EU. The Government therefore welcome the Comparative Advertising Directive which will permit comparative advertising throughout the European Community on an equal basis.

The Directive is due to be implemented in member states by 23 April 2000. My Department has recently consulted on proposals to implement the Directive in UK law by amending the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988.

Pressure Equipment

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if regulations required by EC Council Directive 97/23/EC (O.J. No. L181, 9.7.97, p.1) regarding the harmonisation of laws concerning pressure equipment have been published in each EU country; and if he will list these regulations together with their proposed implementation dates [96453]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Pressure Equipment Regulations 1999, which implement the Pressure Equipment Directive (97/23/EC), were laid before Parliament on 19 July 1999. The main provisions of the Regulations come into force on 29 November 1999, the date of application of the Directive. This is followed by a transitional period until 29 May 2002, when manufacturers may choose whether to comply with the national legislation in force on 29 November 1999 or with the Pressure Equipment Regulations.

It is for the European Commission to monitor the transposition of EU Directives across the Community and take appropriate action as necessary. The Commission publishes information on which Directives have been transposed on its CELEX database. This can be accessed on the parliamentary intranet (PDVN) as part of the JUSTIS database which is available in the Libraries of the House.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arms export licences have been issued for shipments to Sri Lanka since May 1997. [96419]

Dr. Howells: For the period 2 May 1997 to 25 February 1999, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on 17 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *683–84*.

The entry in the relevant legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating. The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results were obtained. Between 26 February and 19 October 1999, 22 Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and 3 Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) were issued for the export to consignees or end-users in Sri Lanka of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, commonly known as the Military List. Individual licences may cover a range of goods with various ratings (and OIELs may also cover a range of countries). Where this is so, the licence is included in the Table in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

Individual Licences issued between 26 February 1999 and 19 October 1999 for the export to Sri Lanka of goods on the Military List

Rating	*Number of SIELs issued covering goods with this rating*	*Number of OIELs issued covering goods with this rating*
ML1	2	0
ML2	2	0
ML3	4	0
ML4	4	0
ML5	2	1
ML6	1	0
ML7	2	0
ML11	2	2
ML13	0	1
ML14	0	1
ML15	3	0
PL5001	1	0
PL5017	3	0
PL5030	1	0

This information does not cover any Media OIELs that may have been issued during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

This information should be considered in light of the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns *307–08*.

In addition, Sri Lanka is a permitted destination on certain Open General Export Licences covering the export of goods on the Military List; copies of all Open General Export Licences valid at any time during the period are in the Library of the House.

Export Licensing

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licence applications have been referred to a interdepartmental committee for discussion or advice in each of the last six months; how

many have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused; and what have been the (i) average, (ii) shortest and (iii) longest times between referral and decision. [96480]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* Extracting all of the information requested would involve disproportionate cost. However, in respect of Iran over the six month period 1 April 1999 to 30 September 1999, 53 export licences have been issued and seven applications refused. All of these have been considered by the relevant interdepartmental committee.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what dates the interdepartmental committee on export licensing will meet within the next month; what is the normal frequency of meetings; and what arrangements are in place to process urgent applications quickly. [96482]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The next meeting of the relevant interdepartmental committee on export licence applications for Iran is scheduled for 9 November 1999. This committee meets once a month. All applications are dealt with case by case and within a time scale which allows for proper consideration.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are employed in his Department in examining arms export licence applications. [97062]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Strategic export controls, including for goods entered in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (known as the Military List) are administered by the Export Control Organisation (ECO), part of the DTI's Export Control and Non-Proliferation Directorate (XNP). Most ECO staff may, for various reasons, be required to examine licence applications for goods on the Military List. The ECO staff complement in 1999–2000 is 135.8 staff; the actual number in post at any one time may vary slightly from this figure.

Financial Investigations

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what circumstances persons interviewed under section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986 are instructed not to talk publicly about their evidence, after an investigation has been concluded. [96407]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* Confidentiality requirements placed on witnesses in inspections, above those set out in statute for which there are criminal penalties, are a matter for inspectors. However the Department encourages inspectors to make clear to all witnesses the general and continuing confidentiality of the inspection process.

Publications (Carriage Charges)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to review the carriage charges for newspapers and magazines. [96871]

Dr. Howells: Terms and conditions are usually a matter for commercial negotiation between the parties concerned. The Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for monitoring markets and considering allegations of anti-competitive practices. If anybody has evidence of anti-competitive behaviour concerning carriage charges, they should contact the Director-General.

European Coal Industry

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures his Department has taken to ensure that EU member states do not engage in measures which distort the European coal industry after 2002. [96888]

Mrs. Liddell: Aid paid to coal producers in Europe is governed by the 1993 Coal State Aid Code. This expires along with the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty in 2002. The UK Government will be working with the European Commission and other Member States to ensure that the arrangements after 2002 avoid distortion of the European coal market. In the meantime, we must ensure that aid which is currently approved by the Commission under the existing rules does not distort the market against unsubsidised producers in the ECSC including those in the UK.

In the case of Spain, we have formally complained to the European Commission about discriminatory application of limits on the sulphur content of coals from different ECSC resources, and have received assurances that UK coal will be treated on the same basis as Spanish coal. This should open the Spanish market to a range of UK coals.

We have also laid a formal complaint against Spanish state aid for coal, questioning whether the required criteria of ultimate viability has been fulfilled for all those producers receiving operating aid under the ECSC Coal State Aid code. The European Commission have also made clear that a subsidy of one peseta per kilowatt/hour (equivalent to around 35p a gigajoule of coal) available to Spanish power-station operators burning Spanish coal should be equally available in respect of UK coal.

In the case of Germany, following our complaint to the European Commission on behalf of Celtic Energy Ltd setting out how state aid provided to Sophia Jacoba and Ibbenburen mines led to a distortion in the anthracite market in the ECSC and particularly in the UK, the Commission found there had been abuse of state aid and reached a decision on 29 July 1998 requiring repayment of nearly DM 20 million state aid by the German producers. This decision provides UK producers with an assurance that such unfair practices will not recur and should help to open up continental markets for competitive UK exports of anthracite.

We made representations to the Commission in March 1998 on the proposed merger of the three remaining German hard coal producers, setting out our view that the privatisation of Saarbergwerke for 1 DM represented significant unauthorised aid for German coal production. We are continuing to urge the Commission to reach a view on how this should be handled.

We have also responded to the Commission's notifications that it was initiating procedures under the ECSC Treaty in respect of unauthorised aid being provided by France to its coal producers. We have fully endorsed the preliminary conclusions which the

Commission have reached in their formal notice to the French Government and we believe there is growing evidence that the aid to Charbonnages de France (CdF) is distorting competition in the coal and coal-related sectors.

We have expressed particular concern over the export of Polish coal to UK market at prices which appear to be below production costs. We have raised this issue both with the Polish Government and with the European Commission who are responsible for ensuring that Poland meets the conditions of its accession arrangements to the EU. We have made clear that we expect Polish coal exported to the British isles to be withdrawn unless its selling price can be shown to cover its appropriately allocated production and transportation costs.

We will continue to press the European Commission to interpret the Code strictly and, in particular, to ensure that operating aid is paid only to those undertakings which can demonstrate that they can be competitive within a reasonable time period. Undertakings which cannot demonstrate this should be given closure aid only. We support many of the arguments that RJM Mining have made in this respect to the court of First Instance and note that the Court's Judgement of 9 September 1999 that authorisation of operating aid must be subject to the condition that the recipient undertakings have achieved a significant reduction in their production costs.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if persons interviewed by his Department's inspectors in relation to an inquiry into insider dealing are offered transcripts of the meeting to enable them to check for accuracy. [96744]

Dr. Howells: While the conduct of inspections is a matter for the inspectors, it is their usual practice to provide a transcript of any formal interview of a witness to that witness for comment.

World Poverty

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific progress he is making in linking his Department's work with the objective of the Department for International Development for relieving world poverty. [96663]

Mr. Caborn: My Department works closely with the Department for International Development, for example through an Interdepartmental Group on Trade and Development which co-ordinates our efforts to ensure that developing countries benefit more fully from the world trade system. Together, the two Departments have worked successfully to establish an EU approach to a comprehensive new round of negotiations in the WTO which reflects this concern—including a call for duty-free access for essentially all products from the least developed countries by the end of the round.

In July, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced the review of ECGD's Mission and Status, which will take account of the relationship of ECGD's activities with the Government's wider objectives. In this context, I particularly want the review to look at what more ECGD could do to help the Government to achieve their wider sustainable development objectives, as the UK continues to play a leading role in assisting the poorest developing countries to emerge from the debt and poverty burdens and return to the international trading community.

Arthritis Research

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research into children's arthritis the Government fund; and if he will make a statement. [96661]

Ms Hewitt: The Government fund health and medical research mainly through the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health.

The Medical Research Council spent about £160k in 1998–99 on projects specifically involved with juvenile arthritis. In addition, the MRC spent £1,128k on arthritis as a whole—much of which will be relevant to the treatment of children with the condition.

The Department of Health has recently funded projects on juvenile arthritis with a total value of over £500k.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94985]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* My Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its Public Service Agreement—published in the Government White Paper of December 1998, called "Public Services for the Future: Modernisation, Reform, Accountability" (Cm 4181)—and in its Expenditure Plans Reports. The Output and Performance Analysis published in March this year showed the measures of success it will use.

A full list of the targets and target dates for Agencies of this and other Government Departments is published annually in the Next Steps Report and these can also be found in each Agency's Annual Report. Targets for the Executive NDPBs are also published annually in the Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies Report. Copies of these documents are in the Library of the House.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [96913]

Dr. Howells: The method of depreciation of fixed assets used by this Department is to use a calculated rate which will write off the valuation of the asset by equal instalments over its estimated useful life after allowing for any residual value. This method is in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual which is underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15, "Tangible Fixed Assets", issued by the Accounting Standard Board.

Members of Parliament (Company Affairs)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries his Department has undertaken in relation to the company affairs of Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords within the last 10 years; and how many of these have been published. [97100]

Dr. Howells: Records are not maintained in a form which could provide the information requested.

Export Guarantees Advisory Council

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library the minutes of meetings of the Export Guarantees Advisory Council. [97105]

Mr. Caborn: The Export Guarantees Advisory Council (EGAC) primarily provides advice on the Export Credits Guarantee Department's country risk assessments and cover policy proposals.

The minutes of the EGAC are not published because these assessments contain frank analysis of the political and economic prospects of many of our trading partners, disclosure of which could be market sensitive. Public disclosure of the minutes could also inhibit the frank discussion of the risk assessments and thus reduce the quality of independent advice provided by Members.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out the procedures the Export Credit Guarantee Department uses when it appoints members of the Export Guarantees Advisory Council. [97103]

Mr. Caborn: Appointments to the Export Guarantees Advisory Council (EGAC) are made in accordance with guidance laid down by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

A panel comprising the ECGD Chief Executive and two Independent Assessors selects a shortlist of candidates to recommend to my hon. Friend the Minster for Trade. Members appointed provide their time on a voluntary basis and would normally expect to serve a term of three years.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 when he has asked for advice from the Export Guarantees Advisory Council in respect of matters relating to the operation of the Export Credit Guarantee Department. [97102]

Mr. Caborn: The Export Guarantees Advisory Council (EGAC) has met 25 times since 1 May 1997. It meets between 9 and 11 times a year to provide advice to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The EGAC is established pursuant to Section 13 of the Export and Investment Guarantees Act 1991.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list *(a)* the instances since 1 May 1997 when members of the Export Guarantees Advisory Council have absented themselves from a meeting because an area in which they have declared an interest is under discussion, *(b)* the names of the council members concerned and *(c)* the items under discussion. [97104]

Mr. Caborn: Members of the Export Guarantees Advisory Council are obliged to declare any interest which is then noted in the official record of the meeting. They are not required to absent themselves from the meeting when an interest has been declared.

The Council's main role is to consider ECGD's country risk assessments and recommendations—which determine whether ECGD should be on or off cover for particular markets.

Since 1 May 1997, Members have declared an interest on the following occasions:

Declarations of Interest—Export Guarantees Advisory Council

Meeting	*Name*	*Item under discussion*
1998		
March	Mr. G. Lynch	Review of Overseas Investment Insurance (OII)
May	Mr. D. Harrison	Turkey
1999		
May	Mr. P. Mason	Zimbabwe
July	Ms L. Airey Mr. P. Mason	Turkey
September	Mr. D. Harrison	OII—Cover for Portfolio Loans

Fixed-Term Contracts

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce regulation of the use of temporary contracts of employment in the private sector utilities. [97210]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government are committed to implementing the Fixed-term work Directive by July 2001. The Directive will ensure that fixed-term contracts are not abused, while retaining labour market flexibility.

Recruitment Industry

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer on 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *935*, concerning the calculations of costs arising from changes to the regulations governing care agencies, if he will *(a)* itemise the reasons his Department does not accept the calculations and *(b)* publish his own calculations. [97386]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The consultation document published on 31 May contains a regulatory impact assessment of possible cost consequences to those hiring staff through employment bureaux. The figures provided by Mrs. Gifford of Able Community Care contain substantial increases in respect of items, such as basic pay and agency commission, which we do not believe result from the proposals contained in the document.

Supermarkets

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to receive the result of the Competition Commission's investigations into supermarkets in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [97299]

Dr. Howells: The Commission is due to report to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by 7 April 2000. If the Commission were to request an extension to the deadline for submitting its report, it would be considered carefully.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) of 29 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *1016*, on the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, if he will list the relevant companies and institutions to which he makes reference in respect of safeguards declarations. [97562]

Dr. Howells: In preparing the voluntary declarations to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Safeguards Office of my Department contacted a total of 165 companies and institutions to determine whether they were performing activities which would need to be reported under the protocol additional to the UK/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement following its entry into force. The declarations eventually submitted to the IAEA were based upon information provided by:

Urenco Ltd.

AEA Technology plc.

BNFL

British Energy

British Steel Engineering

British Shielding Windows Ltd.

IMI Nuclear Components Ltd.

Health and Safety Executive.

Car Pricing

Ms Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he plans to take to make it easier for British consumers to buy fairly priced cars. [95846]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) at column *275*.

CHP Station (Ansty)

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his decision on Rolls-Royce Power Ventures Ltd's proposal to build a combined heat and power station at Ansty, near Coventry. [97613]

Mrs. Liddell: I have today granted clearance under Section 14 of the Energy Act 1976 to Rolls-Royce Power Ventures Ltd.'s notification to build a 49 MW gas-fired combined heat and power station at Rolls-Royce's Ansty works. The decision has been taken in accordance with the policy set out in the White Paper entitled "Conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation and Government response to fourth and fifth Reports of the Trade and Industry Committee" (Cm 4071).

Decisions on other applications under consideration will be announced in due course.

Copies of the Press Notice and the clearance letter are being placed in the Library of the House.

Correspondence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he plans to reply to the communication sent to him by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East on 8 March, and to the reminder sent on 30 June, about unsolicited mail for his constituent Mr. Loveland. [96483]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* My office has received neither of these letters. If the hon. Member would provide me with a copy, I shall ensure he receives an immediate reply.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Luxembourg on 29 October; and if he will make a statement. [97106]

Mr. Straw: The Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) and I represented the United Kingdom at the Council. The main matters dealt with were as follows:

'A' points

The Council agreed as an 'A' point, among other things, the annual report for 1997–98 on football hooliganism in European Union member states.

Open debate on the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

The Council discussed the outcome of the Tampere European Council. The Commission undertook to present to the December Justice and Home Affairs Council a first draft of the 'scoreboard' (ie progress report) on implementing specific Tampere measures.

Follow-up to the Tampere European Council

The Presidency presented a paper they had prepared jointly with the Commission and Council Secretariat on implementation of the results of the Tampere European Council. There was no significant discussion.

Draft Eurodac Regulation

The Council noted the Presidency's progress report and encouraged the intensification of efforts to resolve outstanding issues in order to reach agreement at the December Council.

Draft Mandate for a parallel Dublin Agreement with Iceland and Norway

At the previous Council meeting on 4 October, the Commission had presented its proposal for a Community agreement to bring Norway and Iceland into the Dublin Convention arrangements. On 29 October, the Council noted that the agreement needed to be concluded quickly and remitted the draft mandate to Coreper to resolve outstanding difficulties.

Council decision on opening negotiations between Europol and third countries and international organisations

After discussions, further consideration of the draft instrument was remitted to Coreper.

Mutual Legal Assistance Convention: Interception Provisions

The Presidency noted that, while good progress had been made and agreement appeared to be closer, the provisions relating to interception of telecommunications in the draft Convention on

Mutual Assistance in criminal matters were still subject to some debate. It circulated for consideration a further compromise text. After discussion, the Presidency concluded that the issue should be remitted to Coreper, with a view to ultimate agreement at the December Council.

Justice and Home Affairs information for National Parliaments

This item was remitted to the December Council.

Police Complaints

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the total cost and *(b)* the cost by force of running police complaints and discipline departments for the last year in which figures are available in each of the 43 police authorities in England and Wales. [97119]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This information is not available centrally.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state *(a)* what categories of complaints and *(b)* how many complaints were received in each category, by the police complaints and discipline departments for the last year in which figures are available, in each of the 43 police authorities in England and Wales. [97120]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The categories of complaint used by police complaints and discipline departments are as follows:

1. Oppressive Behaviour
Category A: Serious non-sexual assault
Category B: Sexual assault
Category C: Other assault
Category D: Oppressive conduct/harassment
Category E: Unlawful arrest etc.

2. Racial Discrimination
Category F

3. Malpractice
Category G: Perjury/irregularity in evidence
Category H: Corrupt practice
Category J: Mishandling of Property

4. Failures in Duty
Category K: Breach, Code A
Category L: Breach, Code B
Category M: Breach, Code C
Category N: Breach, Code D
Category P: Breach, Code E
Category R: Breach, unspecified or multiple
Category S: Other neglect of duty
Category T: Other irregularity in procedure

5. Incivility
Category U

6. Traffic
Category V

7. Other
Category W.

Information showing the number of complaints received in each category for financial year 1998–99 is given in the table:

Number of complaints recorded during the year, according to category of complaint 1998–99

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K
Avon and Somerset	7	1	246	114	63	23	7	0	13	6
Bedfordshire	1	1	36	8	15	0	1	4	5	2
Cambridgeshire	1	0	95	29	23	4	16	0	14	5
Cheshire	4	3	149	70	23	9	25	5	28	7
Cleveland	6	1	111	29	23	4	2	6	7	1
Cumbria	2	1	56	63	13	4	12	1	10	1
Derbyshire	8	0	114	40	25	6	4	2	5	5
Devon and Cornwall	12	1	195	83	46	6	15	4	10	15
Dorset	3	0	53	18	7	2	3	1	0	3
Durham	4	0	79	9	6	1	5	0	1	1
Essex	0	0	141	51	30	3	7	6	22	0
Gloucestershire	4	2	69	19	21	4	2	0	8	4
Greater Manchester	29	2	483	74	127	56	36	15	55	7
Hampshire	1	2	209	60	36	7	7	1	13	4
Hertfordshire	4	0	89	39	16	10	6	1	6	3
Humberside	7	0	125	34	17	9	6	4	11	8
Kent	0	1	151	77	57	15	27	6	27	9
Lancashire	15	3	223	98	72	7	27	1	26	9
Leicestershire	3	1	80	42	14	13	1	1	2	5
Lincolnshire	5	0	67	37	13	2	9	1	8	0
City of London	0	0	4	16	7	8	0	1	1	0
Merseyside	20	1	393	187	163	14	42	1	34	22
Metropolitan Police	49	19	1,576	799	476	304	180	25	253	211
Norfolk	0	2	78	37	19	4	8	3	12	11
Northamptonshire	2	0	78	37	6	6	4	2	7	0
Northumbria	16	2	211	40	58	4	11	3	22	7
North Yorkshire	1	1	93	26	10	6	16	1	5	4
Nottinghamshire	5	2	172	84	36	17	12	1	19	5
South Yorkshire	3	1	183	23	37	4	13	1	13	6
Staffordshire	3	0	157	55	36	7	11	2	8	4
Suffolk	0	0	80	19	10	4	8	0	11	3

Number of complaints recorded during the year, according to category of complaint 1998–99

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K
Surrey	2	0	107	108	29	10	4	2	19	6
Sussex	6	2	197	178	52	14	28	1	54	28
Thames Valley	18	3	202	79	64	17	17	3	18	9
Warwickshire	0	1	60	31	8	5	5	0	5	1
West Mercia	8	1	155	25	28	6	17	0	13	6
West Midlands	19	4	462	127	134	49	34	7	39	11
West Yorkshire	22	4	278	66	62	16	20	3	17	2
Wiltshire	5	1	81	46	10	7	1	0	7	2
Dyfed-Powys	1	1	23	39	15	5	9	0	2	4
Gwent	13	2	179	111	28	2	10	0	9	2
North Wales	2	4	102	45	18	2	7	4	8	4
South Wales	16	1	224	74	19	13	16	5	29	1
England and Wales	327	71	7,866	3,246	1,962	709	691	124	876	450

Number of complaints recorded during the year, according to category of complaint 1998–99

	L	M	N	P	R	S	T	U	V	W
Avon and Somerset	18	45	2	0	1	105	18	175	3	5
Bedfordshire	11	6	0	0	1	27	6	36	1	0
Cambridgeshire	15	28	0	0	9	59	18	76	5	13
Cheshire	16	27	0	0	0	85	27	101	11	7
Cleveland	17	16	0	1	1	18	9	66	1	7
Cumbria	13	11	1	0	0	24	6	56	11	4
Derbyshire	19	21	0	0	4	50	11	73	6	7
Devon and Cornwall	19	42	0	0	0	145	28	161	11	5
Dorset	4	10	1	0	0	10	5	39	2	4
Durham	3	2	0	0	1	21	3	35	1	9
Essex	5	8	0	0	1	96	21	107	10	2
Gloucestershire	12	17	0	1	0	28	16	61	3	1
Greater Manchester	104	45	0	0	84	251	34	367	20	418
Hampshire	13	39	2	0	5	75	21	128	19	12
Hertfordshire	23	28	0	0	3	68	21	57	7	35
Humberside	13	23	1	0	0	46	19	91	2	9
Kent	23	60	0	0	0	75	24	64	8	0
Lancashire	36	51	1	2	1	88	8	142	17	23
Leicestershire	13	12	0	0	3	28	7	40	1	12
Lincolnshire	9	26	1	0	0	51	12	51	8	4
City of London	4	3	0	0	0	9	0	13	2	1
Merseyside	26	73	0	0	0	141	24	233	11	44
Metropolitan Police	166	272	2		16	1,094	101	1,424	67	122
Norfolk	15	11	1	1	0	59	14	41	9	2
Northamptonshire	6	13	0	0	0	26	16	43	5	5
Northumbria	27	53	0	0	0	32	15	95	2	31
North Yorkshire	7	23	0	0	2	45	26	74	6	17
Nottinghamshire	39	47	0	0	0	101	15	116	2	16
South Yorkshire	19	35	0	0	0	63	10	133	4	3
Staffordshire	8	11	0	0	0	114	11	89	3	2
Suffolk	11	14	0	0	0	53	14	37	4	0
Surrey	13	28	1	0	0	134	41	192	13	20
Sussex	57	74	0	2	0	164	77	187	29	3
Thames Valley	24	48	0	0	1	66	24	127	12	36
Warwickshire	5	16	1	0	0	19	1	28	4	16
West Mercia	12	31	0	0	0	51	5	90	6	0
West Midlands	78	113	2	0	4	86	62	294	10	55
West Yorkshire	28	62	1	0	0	53	12	133	6	11
Wiltshire	7	13	1	0	0	9	5	51	6	7
Dyfed-Powys	11	15	0	0	0	13	6	35	0	1
Gwent	18	18	0	0	6	28	21	44	7	7
North Wales	15	11	1	0	0	50	2	74	9	8
South Wales	18	24	0	0	1	104	12	181	12	2
England and Wales	1,002	1,525	19	7	144	3,864	846	5,564	376	986

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of days taken in investigating complaints for each of the police complaints and discipline departments in each authority in England and Wales for the last year in which figures are available. [97121]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The available information is in terms of the average completion times for complaints cases, and is given in the table.

Average completion times for complaints cases 1998–99

Police force area	*Days*
Avon and Somerset	70
Bedfordshire	94
Cambridgeshire	101
Cheshire	137
Cleveland	74
Cumbria	88
Derbyshire	72
Devon and Cornwall	87
Dorset	77
Durham	64
Essex	82
Gloucestershire	56
Greater Manchester	72
Hampshire	118
Hertfordshire	82
Humberside	75
Kent	141
Lancashire	98
Leicestershire	102
Lincolnshire	69
City of London	69
Merseyside	87
Metropolitan Police	112
Norfolk	109
Northamptonshire	149
Northumbria	108
North Yorkshire	84
Nottinghamshire	82
South Yorkshire	80
Staffordshire	97
Suffolk	85
Surrey	85
Sussex	114
Thames Valley	58
Warwickshire	93
West Mercia	88
West Midlands	83
West Yorkshire	92
Wiltshire	96
Dyfed-Powys	66
Gwent	148
North Wales	132
South Wales	124

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police officers, broken down by rank, were employed in each of the 43 police complaints and discipline departments for the last year in which figures are available; [97122]

(2) how many whole-time equivalent police officers, broken down by rank, were seconded to each of the 43 police complaints and discipline departments for the last year in which figures are available; [97123]

(3) how many whole-time equivalent non-police support staff were employed to work in each of the 43 police complaints and discipline departments for the last year in which figures are available. [97124]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Figures on police staffing of complaints and discipline departments for 1995–96, the latest year for which information was collected, are given in the table. Information on secondments to complaints and discipline departments and on employment of non-police staff is not available.

Police functions: Complaints and discipline

Forces 1995–96	*Total strength (HMIC1)*	*Total ACPO strength*	*Total Chief Supt. strength*	*Total Supt. strength*	*Total Chief Inspector strength*	*Total Inspector strength*	*Total Sergeant strength*	*Total Constable strength*
Avon and Somerset	11	0	0	4	2	2	3	0
Bedfordshire	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
Cambridgeshire	5	0	0	1	2	2	0	0
Cheshire	9	0	0	1	4	4	0	0
City of London	3	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Cleveland	9	0	0	0	2	4	3	0
Cumbria	5	0	0	1	1	1	2	0
Derbyshire	5	0	0	1	3	1	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	15	0	0	1	5	2	7	0
Dorset	7	0	0	1	1	5	0	0
Durham	7	0	0	2	1	4	0	0
Dyfed-Powys	4	0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Essex	10	0	0	1	4	1	4	0
Gloucestershire	6	0	0	1	2	1	2	0
Greater Manchester	46	0	0	7	7	25	7	0
Gwent	7	0	0	1	3	0	3	0
Hampshire	7	0	0	4	0	3	0	0
Hertfordshire	6	0	0	1	1	3	1	0
Humberside	10	0	0	1	2	5	2	0
Kent	18	0	0	2	5	4	7	0
Lancashire	14	0	0	4	4	1	5	0
Leicestershire	6	0	0	1	2	2	1	0
Lincolnshire	3	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Merseyside	22	0	0	6	0	7	9	0
Metropolitan Police	199	0	0	11	41	17	121	9
Norfolk	7	0	0	1	3	3	0	0
North Wales	3	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
North Yorkshire	7	0	0	1	2	3	1	0
Northamptonshire	5	0	0	2	2	1	0	0
Northumbria	14	0	0	4	1	9	0	0

Police functions: Complaints and discipline

Forces 1995–96	*Total strength (HMIC1)*	*Total ACPO strength*	*Total Chief Supt. strength*	*Total Supt. strength*	*Total Chief Inspector strength*	*Total Inspector strength*	*Total Sergeant strength*	*Total Constable strength*
Nottinghamshire	8	0	0	3	2	3	0	0
South Wales	18	0	0	2	8	8	0	0
South Yorkshire	17	0	0	4	1	8	0	40
Staffordshire	9	0	0	3	3	3	0	0
Suffolk	6	0	0	1	2	0	3	0
Surrey	7	0	0	2	0	5	0	0
Sussex	15	0	0	2	4	6	3	0
Thames Valley	17	0	0	4	1	11	1	0
Warwickshire	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
West Mercia	13	0	0	2	4	6	1	0
West Midlands	26	0	0	6	1	19	0	0
West Yorkshire	27	0	0	5	0	18	2	2
Wiltshire	4	0	0	1	1	2	0	0
England and Wales total	643	0	0	101	132	205	190	15

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of hours spent on investigations, broken down by category, by the police complaints and discipline departments in each of the 43 police complaints authorities in England and Wales for the last year for which figures are available. [97125]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This information is not available centrally.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department *(a)* how many complaints and *(b)* in what categories, were supervised by the police complaints authority in each of the 43 police authorities in England and Wales for the last year in which figures are available. [97126]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information is readily available only on the number of investigations, by individual force, supervised by the Police Complaints Authority (PCA). This is shown for 1998–99 in the table.

Police complaints authority supervised investigations April 1998—March 1999

Force	*Total for year*
Avon and Somerset	10
Bedfordshire	17
Cambridgeshire	8
Cheshire	8
City of London	1
Cleveland	13
Cumbria	7
Derbyshire	10
Devon and Cornwall	30
Dorset	5
Durham	8
Dyfed-Powys	8
Essex	10
Gloucestershire	12
Greater Manchester	80
Gwent	20
Hampshire	16
Hertfordshire	8
Humberside	19
Kent	21
Lancashire	25
Leicestershire	11
Lincolnshire	13
Merseyside	60
Met—Area 1	31
Met—Area 2	35

Police complaints authority supervised investigations April 1998—March 1999

Force	*Total for year*
Met—Area 3	31
Met—Area 4	52
Met—Area 5	29
Met—Miscellaneous	17
Norfolk	10
North Wales	10
North Yorkshire	9
Northamptonshire	9
Northumbria	23
Nottinghamshire	16
South Wales	48
South Yorkshire	9
Staffordshire	5
Suffolk	6
Surrey	11
Sussex	23
Thames Valley	35
Warwickshire	3
West Mercia	10
West Midlands	49
West Yorkshire	47
Wiltshire	6
Non-Home Office forces	
British Transport	7
Ministry of Defence	2
Port of Liverpool	0
Port of Tilbury	0
Royal Parks	0
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority	0
Total	953

Police Manpower

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the conditions which police forces in England and Wales must fulfil before they can apply to his Crime Fighting Fund for money to recruit additional officers. [97232]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We will be discussing the proposals with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities before formally inviting bids from forces for money from the Crime Fighting Fund. We are currently preparing the bidding guidelines. I will place a copy of the guidelines in the Library when they have been finalised.

Meat Supplies

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the sourcing of meat and meat products for consumption in his Department's canteen. [96955]

Mr. Straw: The sourcing of meat and meat products for consumption in my Department's staff restaurant is a matter for the contractor, Gardner Merchant, to decide.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to require the Prison Service to buy meat exclusively from sources which match British standards of hygiene and animal welfare; and if he will make a statement; [96977]

(2) what is his policy towards the purchase of French meat and meat products by the Prison Service. [96976]

Mr. Boateng: All contracts for the supply of meat to the Prison Service are subject to European Union Supplies Directive 93/36/EEC. The contracts are awarded to the suppliers submitting the most economically advantageous bid. The criteria consider price, quality, delivery and service offered. The European Directive requires that all products are purchased openly and competitively to British and European standards. All Prison Service specifications for meat are written by the British Meat and Livestock commission and any company wishing to supply meat to the Prison Service must adhere to those specifications.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of meat purchased by the Prison Service is reared and produced in the United Kingdom. [96956]

Mr. Boateng: The proportion of meat purchased under central contract by the Prison Service by country of origin is given in the table.

However, this central contract is not mandatory and, as each prison establishment holds its own budget, purchases can be made under local arrangements from other sources. Details of these are not kept centrally. The introduction of mandatory contracts is under consideration.

Country of origin of meat purchased under central contract by the Prison Service

Meat type	*Country of origin*	*Percentage*
Pork	English	100
Bacon—middle, collars and	Irish	90
Gammons—Streaky	Dutch	10
Beef—Dices and Minces	English	100
Beef—Joints	Irish	87
	Zimbabwean	13
Lamb	New Zealand	100
Chicken	English	100
Offal	English	100

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if French meat and meat products are used in food sold in his Department's canteen; and if he will make it his policy to stop further purchases of French meat and meat products. [96978]

Mr. Straw: The staff restaurant at the Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate and the Prison Service restaurant at Abell House are both run under contract by Gardner Merchant. I understand from Gardner Merchant that neither French meat nor meat products are used in food sold in these staff restaurants.

Criminal Records Bureau

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the average costs to a voluntary organisation of access to the Criminal Records Bureau; and if he will make a statement. [96449]

Mr. Charles Clarke: When the Criminal Records Bureau comes into operation, it will be expected to recover its costs through charges for the certificates that it will issue, on application, to individuals. It will be for a voluntary organisation to decide the circumstances in which individuals should apply for a certificate, the type of certificate, and whether to reimburse the cost. Until the Bureau's operating costs have been determined, it will not be possible to fix the charges for certificates, but the cost of certificates has been previously estimated at between £5 and £10, depending upon the type of certificate. We have made clear our intention to keep the cost as low as possible.

Smuggling

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were prosecuted for smuggling tobacco or alcohol into the United Kingdom in 1997 to 1999. [96868]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information held centrally on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database combines sections 50(2)(3), 68(2) and 170(1)(2) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 "Fraudulent evasion of duty etc other than drugs". However, the type of goods involved (eg tobacco, spirits, beers, wines, oils, guns) are not identified separately.

Trespassers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been convicted of offences under section 61 and section 77 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994 in each year since the implementation of the Act. [96665]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information is given in the table.

Number of offenders convicted at all courts for offences under sections 61 and 77 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, England and Wales, 1995–98 [1]

Offence description	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998* [1]
S61				
Power to remove trespassers from land	3	—	6	—
S77				
Power of local authority to direct unauthorised campers to leave land	31	2	4	3

[1] Provisional

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legal duty exists for the police to take into account social factors in exercising their power under Section 61 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994. [96664]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There is no statutory requirement on the police to take account of social factors in the exercise of their powers to direct trespassers to leave land under section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. However, a recent court ruling indicated that the police should take into account factors of "common humanity" in reaching their decisions (R *v.* West London Magistrates Court ex parte Small, Queen's Bench Division CO/3428/98).

Chinese President (State Visit)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis had operational responsibility for the presence of police officers AB592 Belgravia and CD439 Scotland Yard on Friday 22 October in Cambridge. [96655]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Commissioner tells me that, at the request of Cambridgeshire Constabulary, two Metropolitan police officers were deployed in Cambridge on 22 October to provide advice and assistance on the policing of the visit of the Chinese delegation. The Commissioner retained responsibility for these officers on that date.

Disqualified Drivers

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each year since 1991 what percentage of disqualifications for *(a)* causing death by dangerous driving and *(b)* dangerous driving has been accompanied by (i) an ordinary length retest and (ii) an extended retest. [96638]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The available information relates to the percentage of disqualifications for offences of causing death by dangerous driving (including causing death by careless driving under the influence of drink or drugs, causing death by aggravated vehicle taking and causing bodily harm by furious driving) and dangerous driving, which resulted in a requirement to undertake a driving test in England and Wales and is given in the table:

Percentage of disqualifications for causing death by dangerous driving etc. and dangerous driving that resulted in a driving test requirement, England and Wales

Percentage

Year	*Causing death by dangerous driving etc.*	*Dangerous driving*
1991	3	1
1992	4	4
1993	17	28
1994	35	37
1995	23	40
1996	4	44
1997	34	65

No information is available centrally on the distinction between re-tests and extended re-tests. Information for 1998 is not yet available.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the latest year for which data are available how many driving disqualifications have been imposed; and how many people have been convicted of driving while disqualified. [96634]

Mr. Charles Clarke: 161,267 disqualifications were imposed for motoring offences in England and Wales during 1997, and in addition, 31,120 persons were disqualified under the penalty points system.

During the same period, there were 42,452 convictions for driving while disqualified.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he had made of the number of people who drive while disqualified. [96635]

Mr. Charles Clarke: It is calculated from the figures of disqualifications imposed each year that some 370,000 drivers may be disqualified in England and Wales at any one time. A study conducted in 1991 showed that some 27 per cent. of drivers admitted to driving while disqualified, so on that basis, over 90,000 drivers may be driving while disqualified.

Cleveland Police

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report 1999*, column *77*, on the Cleveland Police, when he expects to be able to publish the legal costs of Cleveland Police in respect of the libel case relating to sexual harassment against three Cleveland police officers; and if he will make a statement. [96396]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Negotiations are still ongoing, however, Cleveland Police is insured against legal costs. This insurance has an excess of £100,000. Therefore, the legal costs of Cleveland Police will be anything up to £100,000. Any remaining costs would be a matter for the insurance company.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department's consultation on a Holocaust Memorial Day is taking place in Scotland. [96622]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Yes. The Government are consulting a wide range of individuals and organisations throughout the United Kingdom about this proposal.

Criminal Intelligence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Government's policy on articles 15 to 20 of the Convention for Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, pertaining to the interception of telecommunications, with special reference to (i) assessed costs, (ii) burden of costs, (iii) monitoring of interceptions and (iv) requirement for warrant. [96582]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government provided information on the requirement for a warrant and the burden of costs under the draft European Union Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters in the reply given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 26 May 1999, *Official Report*, columns *148–49*, by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). We do not anticipate significant extra costs arising out of these provisions. The cost of transmitting the intercept product in response to requests falls to the requesting Member State.

The interception provisions in the draft Convention remain under Parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on Article 14 of the Convention for Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, with special reference to (i) legal immunity for the foreign investigator, (ii) powers to be granted, (iii) monitoring of such activity by the Home Department and (iv) loan of resources from national agencies. [96583]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Article 14 of the draft Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters allows member states, on request, to agree to assist one another by taking part in covert investigations. Any decisions on immunity or powers for foreign investigators will be the responsibility of the authorities in the United Kingdom when the initial decision is taken to agree to a covert investigation. Any decisions will be made with due regard for the existing law and procedures in the United Kingdom. There are no plans for foreign investigators in the United Kingdom to be granted either immunity or police powers.

Oversight of covert investigations and the loan of resources from national agencies are operational matters for the police and other investigating agencies themselves.

Electoral Register

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to prevent the use of the Electoral Register by commercial organisations for sending unwanted direct sales marketing to registered electors. [97149]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Working Party on Electoral Procedures, in its report published on 19 October 1999, recommended that each individual registered elector should have the option of deciding whether the details that they have provided should be included in the commercially available register by using an opt out box on the registration form. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has indicated that he will seek the earliest opportunity for legislation on the Working Party's proposals, but I cannot anticipate whether a Bill containing provisions about this particular matter will be included in the Queen's Speech for the next session.

HEALTH

Primary Care Professionals

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to enhance the role of pharmacists and other primary care professionals; and, if so, how. [94633]

Mr. Hutton: We plan shortly to publish a strategy on community pharmacy which will deal explicitly with the broader role that pharmacists can play in improving health and health care. We intend that, with appropriate training, optometrists should develop their role beyond sight testing to work with general practitioners and ophthalmologists in treating patients with eye diseases.

The steps we are taking elsewhere in primary care will develop services through walk-in centres, personal medical services pilots and the introduction of primary care groups, which will provide a wider range of opportunities for primary care professionals to expand their roles to improve services for patients. Nurses in particular will benefit from these changes and will be further supported by the roll-out of our programme to enable all nurses with district nursing or health visiting qualification who wish to be able to prescribe drugs and appliances for their patients in their own right.

Drugs

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to ensure that the NHS is able to purchase drugs at the cheapest possible rate. [95163]

Mr. Hutton: We have a number of measures in place to help ensure that the National Health Service purchases medicines on reasonable terms.

The Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) secures the provision of branded medicines at fair prices to the NHS that also reflect the cost of researching and developing these medicines. We have recently negotiated a new PPRS which came into effect on 1 October. This includes a reduction of 4.5 per cent. in list prices of branded medicines, which will save the NHS over £150 million a year.

Prices for generic medicines, which are outside the PPRS, are determined by competition in the market. In the past this market has delivered generic medicines at reasonable prices and ensured continuity of supply. Prices, however, have risen sharply this year owning at least in part to supply problems. We are concerned that the scale of the rises may be unjustified and are examining every possible option to see how a more normal market situation can be restored.

Hospitals buy many medicines by competitive tender, often pooling their purchasing power through the NHS Supplies Authority and may utilise formularies to make choices between medicines of similar properties but differing prices.

The arrangements for reimbursing community pharmacies and dispensing doctors for the cost of the medicines they supply contain incentives which encourage them to shop around for the lowest prices, while ensuring that much of the discount which they receive is clawed back. In 1998–99 a total of £400 million was saved in this way.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure by the NHS on items in part IXB of the Drug Tariff in each year from 1988–89 to 1998–99, with such breakdown of the figures for each year to types of item as is available. [96079]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The information available is shown in the table.

Total expenditure by the National Health Service on items in part IXB of the Drug Tariff is not available. The table shows the net ingredient cost of items in part IXB of the Drug Tariff that were dispensed in the community in England. Information on similar items dispensed in hospitals is not available.

The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of an appliance and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income.

Detailed information by individual item can be found in the publication "Prescription Cost Analysis: England", copies of which are in the Library.

The net ingredient cost of incontinence appliances listed in part IXB of the Drug Tariff and dispensed in the community in England, 1988–98

	Net ingredient cost (£000)										
Incontinence appliances	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Anal plugs	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	37.6
Catheter valves	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11.0	96.0	168.4
Drainable dribbling appliances	7.5	17.6	8.7	17.2	16.8	10.1	7.4	7.3	7.1	5.0	5.0
Incontinence belts	3.1	3.1	—	4.6	6.0	8.1	9.8	9.5	8.6	7.9	1.5
Incontinence sheaths	3,476.2	3,404.7	3,749.9	5,683.5	6,506.6	7,316.2	7,803.6	7,891.7	8,310.5	8,692.3	8,990.2
Incontinence sheath fixing strips and adhesives	131.7	162.2	157.0	238.2	255.4	275.9	298.2	317.3	329.0	312.2	296.0
Leg bags	7,209.3	6,774.9	7,665.6	9,746.3	10,840.4	11,842.1	12,647.6	13,371.4	13,684.0	13,850.9	14,280.6
Night drainage bags	2,671.6	2,936.7	3,716.6	4,195.9	4,661.4	5,056.4	5,338.8	5,575.1	5,765.9	5,839.1	5,962.6
Suspensory systems	200.3	61.4	175.6	144.6	149.4	136.0	139.0	143.6	141.2	130.9	116.8
Tubing and accessories	146.4	105.8	97.9	174.1	203.3	179.8	199.7	238.8	278.2	364.5	490.8
Urinal systems	362.7	236.5	213.5	523.1	511.2	490.9	526.0	501.6	492.0	454.1	421.8
Total	14,208.7	13,703.1	15,784.9	20,727.4	23,150.5	25,314.7	26,970.1	28,056.3	29,027.6	29,752.9	30,771.4

Notes:
1. The data up to 1990 are not strictly consistent with data from 1991 onwards. Figures for 1988–90 are based on fees and on a sample of 1 in 200 prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only. Figures for 1991 onwards are based on items and cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.
2. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of a drug and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income.

Kidney Transplants

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were waiting for kidney transplants on 1 January, or other relevant count dates, in each of the last 20 years. [95642]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Year	*Transplants*
1980	1,189
1981	1,461
1982	1,836
1983	2,237
1984	2,432
1985	2,486
1986	2,883
1987	3,151
1988	3,277
1989	3,431
1990	3,416
1991	3,611
1992	3,920
1993	4,287
1994	4,629
1995	4,798
1996	5,047
1997	5,373
1998	5,595
1999	5,690

Residential Care

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the reasons for the delay in making the consultation document, "Fit for the Future: National Required Standards for Residential and Nursing Homes", available to those working in the residential care sector; and if he plans to make an extension to the consultation period. [96447]

Mr. Hutton: "Fit for the Future" was issued to a wide range of organisations and individuals, including all the major provider organisations, for consultation nationally on 8 September. Owing to a very high demand for the report, there were initial difficulties in providing printed copies to people who subsequently requested them. However, "Fit for the Future" is immediately accessible on the internet at:

http://www.doh.gov.uk/pub/docs/doh/fitfuture.pdf

We have no plans to extend the formal consultation period. However, the development of National Required Standards will not be completed overnight and comments received on "Fit for the Future" within a reasonable length of time after 3 December will be considered.

Nut Sensitivity

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent representations he has received from groups concerned about anaphylaxis and the difficulties faced by sufferers in everyday life; [96437]

(2) what representations he has received from leisure providers concerning the use of their facilities, and participation in activities, by sufferers from anaphylaxis. [96441]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the former Minister for Public health met with representatives of the Anaphylaxis Campaign in July 1998 to discuss their concerns about allergy services in the National Health Service and the difficulties faced by sufferers and their families. The Anaphylaxis Campaign has since been involved in further discussions with officials about allergy

services. We have received no representations from leisure providers concerning the use of their facilities by sufferers of anaphylaxis.

Podiatric Services

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those NHS trusts which provide dedicated podiatric surgical services; and if he will make a statement on their contribution to the NHS. [96205]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* We do not hold information on which National Health Service trusts provide dedicated podiatric surgical services. Surgical podiatry has developed as a specialty within the professional practice of podiatry. It plays a useful role in the overall provision of orthopaedic care in the community.

Local Pharmacies

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to support local pharmacies. [96647]

Mr. Hutton: The Government support all pharmacies in England by ensuring they are paid fair and appropriate remuneration for the services they provide on behalf of the National Health Service.

Elderly People (Long-term Care)

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provisions his Department is making to meet the recommendations of the royal commission on long-term care for the elderly; [96750]

(2) what action he has taken with regard to Sir Stewart Sutherland's report on the loss of funds for the elderly in long-term care. [96747]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *752*.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly people are living in long-term care; what proportion are responsible for paying the full or part cost of their care; and what is the average annual cost of looking after a person in long-term care. [96861]

Mr. Hutton: At 31 March 1997 there were 209,000 permanent residents in residential homes catering primarily for elderly people and elderly mentally ill people, and 154,166 people aged 65 and over in nursing homes. Permanent and temporary residents cannot be separately identified.

Information on the numbers of elderly people paying the full or part cost of their residential or nursing home care is not collected centrally. However, a 1996 personal Social Services Research Unit survey found that around 25 per cent. of elderly nursing home residents and around 30 per cent. of elderly residential care home residents are wholly privately funded. Other residential care and nursing home residents contribute towards the cost of their care, with the exception of National Health Service supported nursing home residents; however, any social security benefits they receive may be reduced.

Gross annual expenditure on residential or nursing care in homes for older people was £13,700 per supported resident in 1997–98.

Private Nursing Homes

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to encourage local authorities to place elderly patients who are awaiting discharge from hospital in private nursing homes; and if he will make a statement. [96758]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on 29 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *1027*.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to reduce the regulatory framework for private nursing homes for the elderly. [96756]

Mr. Hutton: Our plans for reforming the regulatory arrangements for care homes and other social services are set out in our White Paper, "Modernising Social Services", published last year. The new arrangements are about improving regulation and reducing bureaucracy.

We will replace the current system, where over 100 health authorities register and inspect nursing homes, each applying locally developed standards, with an independent inspection and registration system applying clear, coherent and consistent National Required Standards to nursing homes across the whole country.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government intend to take to support the private sector in the provision of homes for the elderly. [96755]

Mr. Hutton: We are undertaking a number of measures to improve the commissioning of social services, including from the independent sector. These include the development of better ways to help local authorities to identify what interventions are most effective in replacing good practice and securing sustainable improvements in the efficiency, quality and range of service commissioning for older people; and the use of Best Value service reviews, Joint Reviews with the Audit Commission and Social Services Inspectorate inspections to ensure that best practice is being implemented.

The Government's Small Business Service will be looking at how the needs of small businesses can be met at a national, regional and local level.

Elderly Patients

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has assessed since May 1997 concerning the extra resources required to meet the general practice medical needs of people aged 85 years and over. [96326]

Mr. Hutton: Resources relating to patients aged 85 years and over are not examined separately. Resources to General Medical practices are increased, by way of the Standard Capitation fee, for patients aged 75 years and over. Additionally, the 1998 Doctors and Dentists Review Body recommended that an additional £60 million be allocated for the enhancement of general practitioners' net

remuneration, particularly targeted on mental health and care of the elderly. The profession and the Department agreed that £5 million be distributed through local development schemes to this end.

Nursing and Care Homes

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the Centre for Policy on Ageing in respect of nursing and care homes. [96975]

Mr. Hutton: We published the Centre for Policy on Ageing's proposals on National Required Standards for residential and nursing homes for older people in our consultation document, "Fit for the Future" issued on 8 September. The consultation document was sent to a wide range of organisations and individuals. We will carefully consider all the comments we receive before finalising any regulatory standards and the timetable for implementing them.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effects on the number of pensioners receiving income support of an increase of 75p in the basic state pension coupled with an increase of £3 in the income support level, together with similar proportionate increases in the rates for older pensioners and married persons. [96023]

Mr. Rooker: We estimate that 30,000 pensioners would become newly entitled to the minimum income guarantee if benefit rates were amended in this way.

Notes:

1. "Pensioners" refers to single people aged 60 or over or couples or partners where one is 60 or over.
2. All estimates are derived from the 1999–2000 PSM model based on the 1996–67 FRS uprated to 1999–2000 prices with IS administrative adjustments.
3. Figures exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes.
4. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000 cases.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what undertakings were given by the Building Societies Association with regard to their policy on repossessions in return for the agreement of Her Majesty's Government in 1991 to pay income support for mortgage interest direct to lenders. [96757]

Mr. Bayley: A statement was made to the House of Commons on 19 December 1991 by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer. He stated that in response to DSS making payments direct to the lender, lenders have confirmed that they will not take possession in cases where mortgage interest payments are covered by Income Support.

Income Support

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will review the rates of *(a)* earnings disregard for Income Support and *(b)* earnings disregard for Housing Benefit. [96899]

Mr. Bayley: We review the rates of earnings disregards in all the income-related benefits (including Income Support and Housing Benefit) as part of the annual uprating process.

We believe that work is the best form of welfare, but that support should be there for those people who cannot work. The disregards are designed to achieve a balance between providing an encouragement to part-time work without creating disincentives to full-time work and independence. The Welfare to Work objectives are to create the right conditions for everyone of working age, who is able to work, to move into full-time paid work; supported as appropriate by Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, and the new Working Families and Disabled Persons Tax Credits.

Older People

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the current full membership by *(a)* ministerial title and *(b)* minister's name of the inter-ministerial group for older people. [96511]

Mr. Rooker: The existing membership of the inter-ministerial group for older people is as follows:

The inter-ministerial group for older people

Member	
Jeff Rooker MP (Chair)	Minister of State, Department of Social Security
Right hon. Paul Boateng MP	Minister of State, Home Office
David Hanson MP	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for Wales
Keith Hill MP	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Margaret Hodge MP	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for Education and Employment
Alan Howarth MP	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for Culture, Media and Sport
George Howarth MP	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Dr. Kim Howells MP	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for Trade and Industry
John Hutton MP	Minister of State, Department of Health
Right hon. Baroness Jay of Paddington	Minister for Women
Melanie Johnson MP	Economic Secretary, to the Treasury
Jane Kennedy MP	Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department
Peter Kilfoyle MP	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for Defence
Right hon. Ian McCartney MP	Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Nick Raynsford MP	Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Brian Wilson MP	Minister of State, Scotland Office

The Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Executive also have responsibilities for policies that affect older people. The inter-ministerial group is therefore working closely with Jane Hutt and Iain Gray, both of whom have attended meetings.

CABINET OFFICE

Rural Audit

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will publish the Performance and Innovation Unit's rural audit. [95463]

Marjorie Mowlam: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a project considering objectives for rural economies by the Performance and Innovation Unit on 10 December 1998, *Official Report*, column 278. The Unit expects to publish the report later this year.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list those regulatory impact assessments published during the last six months. [97599]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are necessary, give effective protection, balance cost and risk, are fair and command public confidence. In accordance with this, we require Departments to produce and publish Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) for all regulatory proposals likely to have an impact on business.

I have presented to Parliament today a Command Paper listing 90 RIAs published between 1 January and 30 June 1999. Copies of those listed have been placed in the Libraries of the House. Please note that this Command Paper entitled "Regulatory Impact Assessments" has replaced the previous series entitled "Compliance Cost Assessments". This is the eleventh such Command Paper.

Millennium Projects

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps she is taking to ensure the commercial viability of millennium projects. [96659]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will reply to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

TREASURY

Baby Statistics

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the numbers of *(a)* babies born under (i) 2,500g and (ii) 3,000g by maternal age and *(b)* babies born by maternal age in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [95534]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Dr. Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 4 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question (Order paper 147, page 3299):

What were the number of:

(a) babies born under
(i) 2500gms
(ii) 3000gms

by maternal age, and

(b) babies born by maternal age in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of babies (live and stillbirths) (a) born (i) under 2,500 grams (ii) under 3,000 grams by maternal age and (b) total births by maternal age, England and Wales 1996, 1997[1] and 1998[2]

Year	Maternal age	Total births less than 2,500 grams	Total births less than 3,000 grams	Total births with a stated birthweight
1996	All ages	49,588	159,084	651,428
	less than 20	4,275	13,655	44,883
	20–24	10,455	35,197	126,137
	25–29	15,011	49,805	211,630
	30–34	13,035	40,702	186,848
	35–39	5,655	16,503	69,732
	40+	1,157	3,222	12,198
1997 (revised)[1]	All ages	50,122	159,116	645,341
	less than 20	4,448	14,076	46,603
	20–24	10,047	33,577	119,059
	25–29	14,861	48,548	203,426
	30–34	13,284	41,562	188,044
	35–39	6,165	17,906	75,189
	40+	1,317	3,447	13,020
1998 (provisional)[2]	All ages	49,873	157,131	638,445
	less than 20	4,643	14,413	48,519
	20–24	9,919	32,488	113,996
	25–29	14,363	46,606	193,860
	30–34	13,257	41,581	189,183
	35–39	6,388	18,473	79,232
	40+	1,393	3,570	13,655

[1] Figures for 1997 have been revised from those published in DH3 No.30 1997 Mortality statistics—Childhood, infant and perinatal. See Population Trends No.97 page 3 for further explanation. In 1997 there were 1,193 births without a stated birthweight.

[2] The 1998 figures presented relate to our database as at 9 June 1999. Therefore those figures may differ slight from those published elsewhere. In 1998 there were 894 births without a stated birthweight.

Source:

Series DH3 No.29 1996 Mortality statistics—Childhood, infant and perinatal. In 1996 there were 1,600 births without a stated birthweight.

Charitable Donations

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total amount given to charitable organisations in the last year for which figures are available; and what was the total amount of tax relief for charitable donations in that year. [96864]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Annual estimates for total donations to charities are not available centrally. The Charities Aid Foundation estimates overall income donated by individuals to be around £5 billion to £6 billion per year. In addition to this, charities also benefit from donations by companies and other organisations.

The cost of tax relief on donations to charities under the tax-effective methods of giving, namely Deeds of Covenant, Gift Aid, Millennium Gift Aid and Payroll Giving, in 1998–99 was about £725 million.

National Statistics

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will break down the numbers of people in work as a proportion of those over the state retirement age for each of the last 20 years. [96765]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 4 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions for time series of the numbers of people of working age and numbers of people in employment as a proportion of the population over working age.

The data requested is shown in the table attached using estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS has been used because it can provide estimates of both overall populations and employment. For the periods shown there does not appear to be any trend in the first series and the second tends to have followed the economic cycle. The Labour Force Survey was conducted biannually in the United Kingdom between spring 1979 and spring 1983 and therefore estimates for 1980 and 1982 are not available.

The LFS is a household survey and therefore people in communal establishments will generally be excluded. Around one in 20 people over the state retirement age are in such establishments compared with around one in 100 for those of working age. Consequently the ratio of the population of working age to that over retirement age would have been a little less if people in such establishments were included. Similar considerations apply to the other series.

Population of working age, and people of working age in employment as a proportion of the population over state retirement age
UK, Spring quarters 1979–99, not seasonally adjusted

Year	Population of working age as a proportion of the population over state retirement age	People of working age in employment as a proportion of the population over state retirement age
1979	3.50	2.56
1981	3.44	2.41
1983	3.46	2.33
1984	3.49	2.38
1985	3.47	2.40
1986	3.47	2.41
1987	3.47	2.43
1988	3.47	2.51
1989	3.47	2.57
1990	3.47	2.59
1991	3.47	2.53
1992	3.47	2.47
1993	3.47	2.44
1994	3.48	2.45
1995	3.48	2.48
1996	3.49	2.50
1997	3.49	2.53
1998	3.49	2.55
1999	3.50	2.57

Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the numbers and percentage of workers in firms employing *(a)* below 10 workers, *(b)* from 10 to 50 workers, *(c)* from 50 to 100 workers and *(d)* over 100 workers, over the latest period for which he has data. [96235]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 2 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the numbers and percentage of workers in firms employed in different size bands.

The information requested is available from the Annual Employment Survey (AES) at September 1997 (latest available date) for the size bands shown.

Employee jobs[1] at September 1997, Great Britain

Size band	Thousand	Percentage
1–10	4,528	20
11–49	5,787	26
50–99	2,695	12
100 and over	9,523	42

[1] Figures exclude Agriculture as the way that information is supplied would distort the size band analysis

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 (Cm 4181), stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94977]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The Chancellor's Departments have set out the key performance targets on which they will be judged in their Public Service Agreements (Cm 4181), and the measures of success they will use in the Output and Performance Analysis published by the Treasury on 31 March 1999.

These high level targets are supported at operational level by objectives and targets to ensure delivery by individual units.

Euro

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Buckingham of 27 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 895, if he will list which organisations appear in which working party of the outline National Changeover Plan; and if he will make a statement on the activities and conclusions to date of each working group. [97567]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Treasury published the "Third report on euro preparations" on 1 November. Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House.

Financial Exclusion

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he has taken to ensure that banks address issues of financial exclusion arising from branch closures. [97128]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Banks are being encouraged to develop appropriate products and delivery channels to suit the needs and circumstances of financially excluded people.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to ensure that banks in England and Wales and Northern Ireland follow the lead of Scottish banks in offering basic bank accounts within minimal legal requirements to any customers who need and seek one. [97127]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A number of banks already offer these accounts to customers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and others are planning to do so next year. The Treasury will continue to monitor such developments.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will start rating the banks using post code information currently available on the basis of the extent to which they are providing credit and banking services to every part of the country. [97113]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are no plans to introduce such a scheme.

Gold Reserves

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the gold reserves of *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Germany. [97152]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government have placed considerable importance on making the best use of public assets, including financial assets such as the foreign currency and gold reserves. We considered that with almost half of the United Kingdom's $14 billion of net foreign currency and gold reserves held in gold, it was too big an exposure to one asset. Therefore, we announced on 7 May a technical restructuring of the reserves aimed at achieving a better balance in the portfolio by diversifying more widely. This will leave the reserves and the United Kingdom as a whole in a sounder financial position in the future.

We have made no assessment of the adequacy of the German gold reserves.

Tax Returns

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations his Department has had with *(a)* the Treasury and *(b)* software providers regarding the availability of software packages to accommodate carry-forward and carry-back for the purpose of completing tax returns. [96894]

Mr. Rooker: I have been asked to reply.

This Department works closely with the Inland Revenue and the Treasury in taking forward the proposals in Stakeholder Pension Consultation Brief 6, including the proposal to remove the carry forward and carry back facility. The Department has not had separate discussions with software providers on this issue. However, software providers have had the opportunity to respond to the public consultation and we are now considering all the responses.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Class Sizes

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere on infant class sizes, if he will give a breakdown of the 1,600 new classrooms to which he refers *(a)* by type of school and *(b)* by local education authority. [96918]

Ms Estelle Morris: To date, over 1,700 extra classrooms have been provided through the class sizes initiative. These are detailed by both local education authority and type of school in the following table. Sufficient funding has been earmarked to allow at least 800 further classrooms to be built by September 2001, when statutory limits on infant class sizes are introduced.

Key stage 1 classrooms provided under the class sizes initiative by local education authority and type of school

	KS1 classrooms provided by type of school				
Local education authority	*County/Community*	*Voluntary controlled*	*Voluntary aided*	*GM/Foundation*	*Total*
Barking and Dagenham	2	—	—	—	2
Barnet	3	—	—	—	3
Barnsley	4	—	2	—	6
Bath and North East Somerset	3	2	—	—	5
Bedfordshire	21	2	1	—	24
Bexley	6	—	1	—	7
Birmingham	3	—	2	—	5
Blackburn	4	2	4	—	10
Blackpool	8	—	2	—	10
Bolton	5	1	6	1	13
Bournemouth	5	—	4	—	9
Bracknell Forest	3	2	2	—	7
Bradford	—	—	2	—	2
Brent	—	—	1	—	1
Brighton and Hove	7	—	—	—	7
Bristol	5	—	1	—	6
Bromley	12	—	—	—	12
Buckinghamshire	6	10	5	—	21

Key stage 1 classrooms provided under the class sizes initiative by local education authority and type of school

	KS1 classrooms provided by type of school				
Local education authority	*County/Community*	*Voluntary controlled*	*Voluntary aided*	*GM/Foundation*	*Total*
Bury	9	3	7	4	23
Calderdale	—	—	1	—	1
Cambridgeshire	14	4	3	—	21
Camden	1	—	—	—	1
Cheshire	20	—	5	1	26
City of London	—	—	—	—	0
Cornwall	9	—	4	—	13
Coventry	4	—	3	—	7
Croydon	3	—	—	1	4
Cumbria	6	2	8	4	20
Darlington	3	1	4	—	8
Derby	14	—	2	—	16
Derbyshire	35	10	5	1	51
Devon	13	1	3	—	17
Doncaster	2	—	2	—	4
Dorset	2	5	6	—	13
Dudley	9	—	2	—	11
Durham	8	—	2	—	10
Ealing	9	—	—	—	9
East Riding of Yorkshire	7	7	1	—	15
East Sussex	9	3	—	—	12
Enfield	6	—	5	—	11
Essex	10	4	7	5	26
Gateshead	—	—	2	—	2
Gloucestershire	4	2	3	3	12
Greenwich	1	—	—	—	1
Hackney	—	—	—	—	0
Halton	—	1	1	—	2
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	—	—	—	0
Hampshire	14	2	4	1	21
Haringey	—	—	—	—	0
Harrow	—	—	—	—	0
Hartlepool	4	—	—	—	4
Havering	3	—	1	—	4
Herefordshire	9	—	—	—	9
Hertfordshire	7	4	2	1	14
Hillingdon	24	—	4	—	28
Hounslow	4	—	2	—	6
Isle of Wight	2	1	—	—	3
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—	0
Islington	—	—	—	—	0
Kensington and Chelsea	—	—	—	—	0
Kent	12	2	9	—	22
Kingston upon Hull	6	—	1	—	7
Kingston upon Thames	12	—	14	—	26
Kirklees	13	2	2	—	17
Knowsley	6	—	1	—	7
Lambeth	3	—	2	—	5
Lancashire	47	1	42	1	91
Leeds	10	2	—	—	12
Leicester City	10	1	4	—	15
Leicestershire	12	4	—	—	16
Lewisham	—	—	—	—	0
Lincolnshire	6	6	1	—	13
Liverpool	1	—	3	—	4
Luton	9	—	2	—	11
Manchester	1	—	—	1	2
Medway Towns	6	—	1	—	7
Merton	18	—	9	—	27
Middlesbrough	—	—	1	—	1
Milton Keynes	4	—	2	—	6
Newcastle upon Tyne	6	—	3	—	9
Newham	12	1	1	—	14
Norfolk	18	1	1	—	20
North East Lincolnshire	8	2	—	—	10
North Lincolnshire	5	1	1	—	7
North Somerset	4	—	—	—	4
North Tyneside	9	—	1	—	10
North Yorkshire	18	5	3	—	26
Northamptonshire	13	1	1	1	16
Northumberland	8	—	5	—	13
Nottingham City	7	—	2	—	9

Key stage 1 classrooms provided under the class sizes initiative by local education authority and type of school

Local education authority	KS1 classrooms provided by type of school				
	County/Community	Voluntary controlled	Voluntary aided	GM/Foundation	Total
Nottinghamshire	37	4	5	—	46
Oldham	13	2	14	—	29
Oxfordshire	12	8	9	—	29
Peterborough	5	—	1	1	7
Plymouth	—	—	—	—	0
Poole	7	—	2	—	9
Portsmouth	2	—	2	—	4
Reading	2	—	3	—	5
Redbridge	10	—	1	—	11
Redcar and Cleveland	7	—	1	—	8
Richmond upon Thames	14	—	5	—	19
Rochdale	5	4	6	6	21
Rotherham	7	—	7	—	14
Rutland	—	—	—	1	1
Salford	4	1	1	—	6
Sandwell	14	3	2	—	19
Sefton	8	2	3	—	13
Sheffield	2	—	—	1	3
Shropshire	6	3	1	—	10
Slough	8	—	—	—	8
Solihull	14	1	20	—	35
Somerset	9	6	2	—	17
South Gloucestershire	17	5	1	—	23
South Tyneside	—	—	—	—	0
Southampton	2	—	2	—	4
Southend on Sea	5	—	—	—	5
Southwark	2	—	1	—	3
St. Helens	8	—	3	—	11
Staffordshire	11	1	1	—	13
Stockport	14	5	4	—	23
Stockton on Tees	5	1	1	—	7
Stoke on Trent	15	—	6	—	21
Suffolk	8	—	3	—	11
Sundefland	2	—	—	—	2
Surrey	6	—	6	—	12
Sutton	7	—	2	1	10
Swindon	7	—	—	—	7
Tameside	4	1	4	—	9
Telford and Wrekin	2	1	2	—	5
Thurrock	5	—	—	1	6
Torbay	6	1	3	—	9
Tower Hamlets	—	—	—	—	0
Trafford	6	—	7	—	13
Wakefield	12	1	4	—	17
Walsall	7	3	2	1	13
Waltham Forest	3	—	—	—	3
Wandsworth	4	—	1	—	5
Warrington	7	—	8	—	15
Warwickshire	4	—	3	2	9
West Berkshire	3	2	4	1	10
West Sussex	9	6	4	—	19
Westminster	—	—	—	—	0
Wigan	6	—	21	—	27
Wiltshire	12	—	7	4	23
Windsor and Maidenhead	2	—	2	—	4
Wirral	12	1	4	—	17
Wokingham	8	2	3	—	13
Wolverhampton	15	—	3	—	18
Worcestershire	7	3	4	—	14
York, City of	2	1	1	—	4
Total	1,075	166	434	44	1,718

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere, what estimate he has made of the number of pupils *(a)* at Key Stage 2 in primary schools and *(b)* in secondary schools who will be in classes of over 30 pupils in September 2001. [96919]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have made no such estimates. However, the most recent figures show that the proportion of Key Stage 2 children in classes over 30 fell by 1 per cent. between January 1998 and January 1999. This contrasts with an annual rise every year from January 1996 to January 1998. There was also a year-on-year increase in primary class sizes from 1988 to 1998 as a result of the

budgets of the previous administration. The average number of pupils in Key Stage 2 classes in January 1999 was 28.4. The average number of pupils in secondary classes in January 1999 was 21.9.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere on infant class sizes, how many new classrooms have been provided in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in each year for the last 10 years and how many it is planned to provide in each year that has so far been planned for. [96917]

Ms Estelle Morris: Funding has so far been allocated in support of the Key Stage 1 Class Size Initiative to enable Local Education Authorities to provide over 1,600 more classrooms. Information more generally is not collected centrally.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere on infant class sizes, (1) how many secondary school pupils were in classes of over 30 in *(a)* January 1998, *(b)* January 1999 and *(c)* September 1999; [96772]

(2) how many pupils aged 8, 9 and 10 years were in classes of over 30 in *(a)* January 1998, *(b)* January 1999 and *(c)* September 1999; [96773]

(3) how many children in nursery classes were in classes of over 30 in *(a)* January 1998, *(b)* January 1999 and *(c)* September 1999. [96887]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available information is shown in the following tables.

Number of pupils in classes of over 30 pupils taught by one teacher

	January 1999	*September 1999* [1]	*January 1998*
Nursery Classes[2]	47,227	[4]—	47,579
Key Stage 1	356,586	181,000	485,311
Key Stage 2[3]	835,257	[4]—	832,668
Total Primary	1,278,607	[4]—	1,411,366

[1] This figure includes an estimate of the number of pupils entering later in the autumn term under staggered entry arrangements and for pupils from missing schools
[2] Nursery classes normally include at least one extra adult in the classroom
[3] The proportion of pupils in KS2 classes over 30 fell from 40 per cent. to 39 per cent. between January 1998 and January 1999
[4] Not applicable

	January 1999	*January 1998*
Total Primary	1,278,607	1,411,366
Total Secondary	312,974	282,633
Total Primary and Secondary	1,591,581	1,693,999

Higher Education

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many students are currently enrolled on taught postgraduate courses in higher education institutions in *(a)* Derry, *(b)* Belfast, *(c)* Edinburgh, *(d)* Glasgow, *(e)* Manchester and *(f)* Birmingham; [97049]

(2) what proportions of UK students registered for taught postgraduate courses in computing science in the several higher education institutions located in *(a)* Derry, *(b)* Belfast, *(c)* Edinburgh, *(d)* Glasgow, *(e)* Manchester and *(f)* Birmingham, are paying their own fees. [97050]

Mr. Wicks: The numbers of students enrolled on taught postgraduate courses in institutions in the cities listed are given in the table:

Students enrolled on taught postgraduate courses in HE institutions 1998–99

City	*Number*
Londonderry	727
Belfast[1]	5,217
Edinburgh	7,558
Glasgow	10,240
Manchester	11,522
Birmingham	8,205

The numbers of UK-domiciled students enrolled on taught postgraduate courses in computing science in institutions in the cities listed, and the proportions of these paying their own fees, are given in the table:

City	*UK-domiciled students enrolled on taught postgraduate courses in computing science[2] in higher education institutions 1998–99*	*Percentage of students paying their own fees[3]*
Londonderry	195	71
Belfast[1]	500	61
Edinburgh	367	15
Glasgow	264	19
Manchester	317	27
Birmingham	175	54

[1] Including the University of Ulster at Jordanstown
[2] Excludes students on PGCE courses, who, irrespective of their specialism, can only be identified as "teacher training" students
[3] Excludes students for whom all or any part of their fees are paid from another public or private source, eg their employers

Policy on higher education in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Policy on higher education in Scotland is the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the Government's latest estimate of the proportion of young people in England entering higher education at the beginning of the academic year 1999–2000 from *(a)* semi-skilled and *(b)* unskilled family backgrounds and *(c)* from disadvantaged localities; and what were the comparable figures for each of the last three years. [97153]

Mr. Wicks: The available data on students accepted for entry through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to higher education in the United Kingdom are given in the table. Information on participation rates of young people from disadvantaged localities is not held centrally.

Accepted young[1] home domiciled applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses
United Kingdom

Percentage

Proportion from social class[2]	*Year of entry* 1996	1997	1998	1999
IIIM—Skilled manual	16.4	16.7	16.9	16.9
IV—Partly skilled	7.5	7.6	7.6	8.7
V—Unskilled	1.9	2.0	1.9	2.1

[1] Aged under 21.
[2] The classification system used to assign social class to undergraduates is that used in the National Census—the Standard Occupational Classification published by the Office for National Statistics.
[3] Accepted applicants as at November 1999.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97043]

Mr. Wills: All fixed assets are depreciated on a straight line basis to zero. Exceptions are land, which is not depreciated, and cars, which retain a 20 per cent. residual value. Depreciation methods are in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual. The requirements in the Manual regarding those methods will be underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15 'Tangible Fixed Assets' issued by the Accounting Standards Board. Details of the period over which assets are depreciated are as follows:

Asset type	*Depreciation policy*
Buildings	Up to 50 years
Land	No depreciation
Furniture	7–10 years
Fittings	10 years
Office machinery	3–10 years
Cars	5 years with residual value of 20 per cent.
Vans	8 years
Telecoms	8–10 years
Computers-mainframe	7 years
Computers-non mainframe	3 years
Computer-software	5 years

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects the processing of initial payments of education maintenance allowances under the pilot scheme to have been completed. [97035]

Mr. Wicks: All 15 pilot areas will have made payments of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) by Friday 5 November 1999.

Of the 15 pilot EMA areas, 10 had made payments by the end of September. All young people who were paid late, but were due an EMA when term started in September, received arrears of their EMA with their first payment.

Over 13,000 young people had applied for an EMA by 1 October 1999. EMA payments of over £185,000 had been made by 1 October.

EMAs are an important and exciting new initiative, and early indications are that they are already making a real difference to young people in the pilot areas.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance he has issued to local authorities, training and enterprise councils and colleges of further education concerning the membership and responsibilities of the proposed learning and skills councils. [96710]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The "Learning to Succeed" White Paper set out that employers will be the single largest group on the Council. On 28 October, the Secretary of State announced that at least 40 per cent. of people on the Boards of the new Learning and Skills Councils, together with the national Chair and majority of local Chairs, will be people with significant business experience. It is expected that Board members will be drawn from a wide range of bodies that have an interest in education and training. We want to attract the best individuals available and we will be looking for people from a variety of backgrounds to represent individual and community interests.

In December we will be publishing a document setting out the Government's plans for implementing the proposals in the White Paper. The document will outline how the new structures will work and set out the next steps for implementation.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans he has to make the Integrated Youth Service areas coterminous with local education authority, regional development agency or sub-regional local learning and skills/small business service boundaries; and if he will make a statement; [97057]

(2) what plans he has to make careers and guidance areas coterminous with the sub-regional local learning and skills councils/small business service boundaries; and if he will make a statement. [97058]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* The "Learning to Succeed" White Paper and the Social Exclusion Unit's report "Bridging the Gap" announced the creation of a new youth support service which will provide guidance and support for all young people aged 13–19, building on what is currently provided by the Careers Service, parts of the Youth Service and other organisations.

We have been consulting on the functions and local delivery arrangements for the new service. A further announcement on the Youth Support Service, including the local boundaries, will be made later in the year.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance he has issued to local authorities, training and enterprise councils and colleges of further education concerning the division of

responsibilities between the proposed local learning and skills councils and *(a)* local lifelong learning partnerships and *(b)* the National Learning and Skill Council. [96777]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 3 November 1999]:* We issue regular updates to all our partners on the implementation of our proposals, in "Learning to Succeed", to establish a Learning and Skills Council with both a national and local presence. The Local Councils will be accountable to the National Council for the implementation of national frameworks and policies in their areas. The Local Councils will be accountable to their local communities for meeting local needs, through mechanisms such as public meetings, dissemination of information on the LSC's activities, and effective feedback and complaints mechanisms.

In September, a joint letter was sent from the Department for Education and Employment and its main national partners to all TECs, local education authorities, further education colleges and other local partners summarising the responsibilities of Learning Partnerships in the new post-16 arrangements. Learning Partnerships will continue to be voluntary groupings of post-16 learning providers and users with a local focus. They will be responsible for ensuring that provision is responsive to local community needs. The work of the Learning and Skills Council will need to be informed by an understanding of local labour market needs—Lifelong Learning Partnerships are perfectly placed to provide that.

In December we intend to publish a document outlining how the new structures will work and setting out the next steps for implementation. We also plan to issue more detailed guidance to Learning Partnerships in December on their role, responsibilities and relationship with Local Learning and Skills Councils.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines he has issued to the training and enterprise councils in respect of *(a)* redundancy payments and *(b)* incentive payments to staff pending the establishment of learning and skills councils. [96718]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 3 November 1999]:* Government Offices are currently discussing with TECs their proposals to retain key staff during the transition period to the new Learning and Skills Council and packages for staff in the event that redundancies should be necessary. Those discussions have been based on initial guidance we have provided to Government Offices. We are in the process of finalising the guidance in the light of those discussions and will be issuing it to TECs shortly. I will provide my hon. Friend with a copy of that final guidance as soon as it is issued and I will also place copies in the Libraries of the House.

Citizenship Curriculum

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will include in the new citizenship curriculum provision for the study of aspects of global citizenship, in particular sustainable development; [96461]

(2) what measures he is taking to ensure that guidance notes on the citizenship curriculum give attention to global citizenship. [96462]

Jacqui Smith: The framework for education for citizenship will include the study of the world as a global community. We will issue guidance, to include global citizenship and sustainable development, which will be available to schools in the new year.

Student Loans

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what representations he has received about the quality of service experienced by clients of the Student Loans Company; [96595]

(2) what assessment he has made of the performances of the Student Loans Company in relation to the *(a)* processing of applications and *(b)* answering of telephone inquiries. [96596]

Mr. Wicks: The Student Loans Company (SLC) has played a major part in the successful introduction of the new student support arrangements. To date in academic year 1999–2000, it has made 494,000 student loans. This is around 150,000 more than at the same time in 1998–99. 325,000 telephone inquiries have been answered on the SLC's student support helpline since the start of academic year 1999–2000.

The Department has received 90 complaints from students about the service provided by the SLC on loans for academic year 1999–2000. These represent a very small proportion—some 0.02 per cent.—of the 494,000 loans made. While there have been a very small number of concerns, students have benefited this year from our commitment to get loans to students at the start of term.

Assisted Places

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children were in receipt of an assisted place; and what was the total cost in England and Wales in each year since 1992. [96860]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested is shown in the following table and is in respect of children in England. The cost in 1998–99 was £22 million less than planned expenditure under the previous administration. That saving was used to provide extra teachers to reduce class sizes. Figures for Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Assisted places scheme: England

Academic year	*Number of assisted pupils*	*Total cost in financial year (£ million)*
1992–93	28,674	[1]92.9
1993–94	29,291	92.3
1994–95	29,743	101.5
1995–96	29,917	104.8
1996–97	33,144	117.5
1997–98	36,458	134.4
1998–99	29,795	125.6

[1] Includes £4.9 million brought forward from financial year 1993–94

Education Expenditure

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the current amounts available for expenditure on education by each of the *(a)* shire counties and *(b)* unitary authorities as a percentage of total spending; and indicate what each such authority would have to spend to bring it up to the spending level of the highest-spending shire county. [95221]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information given in the table shows, for 1999–2000, for each shire and unitary local authority in England, (i) the percentage of each authority's total spending which was allocated to education, and (ii) the extra sum each would have to allocate in order to spend as much per pupil as Slough.

Net expenditure—1999–2000

	Education expenditure as percentage of total spending	*Extra spending required for education expenditure to meet £3,325 per pupil (£000)*
Slough	47.47	0
Bristol	40.88	1,359
Windsor and Maidenhead	37.00	2,395
Reading	39.91	2,787
Brighton and Hove	31.65	5,816
Bournemouth	37.66	5,501
Blackburn with Darwen	48.15	6,619
East Sussex	55.89	17,302
Rutland	52.41	1,289
Bath and North East Somerset	50.81	7,411
Cambridgeshire	61.53	23,062
Kent	61.31	65,652
Portsmouth	40.12	8,617
Southampton	41.91	10,227
Leicester City	45.23	16,657
Halton	46.62	7,464
North Lincolnshire	49.62	8,945
Luton	46.85	10,896
Isle of Wight	39.97	7,529
Peterborough	49.85	11,750
Southend-on-Sea	40.98	10,637
Essex	59.77	82,116
Torbay	38.66	7,999
Wokingham	54.74	10,052
Nottingham City	38.44	18,082
Buckinghamshire	63.73	32,094
Derby City	46.36	16,189
North East Lincolnshire	48.19	12,293
Surrey	57.24	60,553
Bracknell Forest	50.61	6,998
Thurrock	49.71	9,807
Plymouth	46.22	18,607
North Somerset	48.30	12,423
Milton Keynes	50.08	15,927
West Sussex	58.08	49,453
Shropshire	60.02	18,964
Lancashire	59.21	86,537
Stoke-on-Trent	46.99	19,614
South Gloucestershire	54.20	19,937
North Yorkshire	62.57	45,516
Leicestershire	63.14	48,861
Durham	57.20	42,174
Oxfordshire	58.44	44,184
Medway Towns	48.83	23,829
Blackpool	34.92	10,876
Hull	40.79	23,485
Nottinghamshire	60.49	66,130
Suffolk	60.50	54,548
Cheshire	59.33	58,833
Staffordshire	63.66	73,665
Somerset	59.74	38,703
Devon	54.71	52,882

Net expenditure—1999–2000

	Education expenditure as percentage of total spending	*Extra spending required for education expenditure to meet £3,325 per pupil (£000)*
Hertfordshire	61.70	95,160
West Berkshire	46.10	13,600
East Riding	47.93	28,168
Warwickshire	60.09	43,313
Dorset	56.49	31,090
Cumbria	58.37	45,667
Redcar and Cleveland	47.29	15,689
Bedfordshire	59.91	37,593
Hampshire	59.62	104,840
Lincolnshire	59.90	59,294
Middlesbrough	43.49	15,682
Cornwall	57.82	44,710
Telford and Wrekin	43.11	15,817
Stockton on Tees	48.54	20,464
Wiltshire	59.96	39,457
Hartlepool	43.41	10,830
Poole	46.29	12,595
Norfolk	55.96	71,169
York	47.53	15,893
Herefordshire	43.68	15,455
Gloucestershire	59.55	54,947
Northamptonshire	62.08	67,279
Northumberland	56.01	34,072
Darlington	44.80	10,655
Warrington	51.75	22,296
Derbyshire	58.17	80,694
Worcestershire	60.38	59,631
Swindon	50.97	21,664

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dairy Industry

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on prospects for the dairy industry. [95837]

Ms Quin: The UK dairy industry has faced a particularly difficult two years and this situation will not easily or quickly be reversed. But recent assistance from the Government in the form of a waiver of cattle passport charges, together with an ending to the uncertainty regarding Milk Marque, will go some way to helping the sector stabilise.

Grassland

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to comply with the EU Directive on EIA agricultural land use changes to prevent further losses of grassland in Devon. [96876]

Mr. Morley: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) on 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *157*.

Lamb

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he plans to take to improve the export market for lamb. [95758]

Ms Quin: Exports of sheepmeat remain close to historic levels. My fellow Ministers and I and overseas posts will ensure that we give British lamb a high profile wherever possible, but the promotion of exports is principally a matter for the industry itself.

Storm Damage (Sussex Coast)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the costs of the damage caused by the recent storm on the West Sussex coast. [96328]

Mr. Morley: Information about such costs is not collected centrally. Local authorities have statutory powers to deal with emergencies and are expected to budget accordingly. They may apply for additional financial assistance where there is a case for doing so under existing rules. Where capital works for flood and coastal defences are justified, government grant will be considered against normal criteria.

Rural Development Regulation

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to increase funding in respect of Rural Development Regulation. [96928]

Mr. Morley: Options for funding the Rural Development Regulation are still being considered. An announcement will be made in due course.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Green: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he has given the Forestry Commission on maintaining public access after the sale of Forestry Commission land; and if he will make a statement. [96960]

Mr. Morley: We stopped large-scale sales of forest land managed by the Forestry Commission when we took up office in 1997. The Commission is, however, still able to sell relatively small and isolated blocks of forest land which do not make a significant contribution to its objectives and are surplus to requirements. Forest land which is important for public access will not be sold unless the Commission has secured a public access agreement with the local authority, which is binding on all subsequent owners of the land.

Organic Farming

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which areas are eligible for grants for conversion to organic farming. [96703]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Under the Statutory Instrument which was laid on 3 November 1999, aid under the Organic Farming Scheme will be available to farmers throughout England.

Pig Farmers

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to alleviate the difficulties facing pig farmers. [96681]

Ms Quin: We are fully aware of the crisis facing the pig sector. We have made an additional £6 million in marketing and promotion aid available and it is our intention that this sector will benefit significantly from this money. I hope that this financial support will strengthen the sector's competitive position in the future and lead to better returns for pig producers.

Furthermore, my right hon. Friend the Minister has recently written to MPs and local authorities to emphasise the importance of sourcing pigmeat products to British standards. He has also made a formal request to the EU Commission to reopen the private storage aid scheme. We are tackling misleading labelling and are consulting on revised guidelines to Trading Standards Authorities. Ministers are committed to better auditing of claims on welfare and other standards of imported products. We will have meetings with retailers to insist that they reaffirm their commitments of last year on sourcing pigmeat to British standards. Similar meetings will take place with leading caterers. We will also be asking the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) to consider whether the current ban on the use of porcine meat and bonemeal (MBM) is still justified.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Pastoral Measure 1983

Mr. Quinn: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, when it is proposed to review the Pastoral Measure 1983; and if he will make a statement. [96633]

Mr. Stuart Bell: A motion from the Wakefield Diocesan Synod seeking a review of the redundancy provisions of the Pastoral Measure is likely to be debated by the General Synod next year.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 5 November 1999

WALES

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if there are any proposals to amend the Welsh Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000. [97785]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XIV, Vote 1 (the Welsh Office, the Wales Office and the National Assembly for Wales) the Welsh Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000 will be increased by £124,972,000 from £7,092,517,000 to £7,217,489,000. The increase is the result of:

i) Net transfers of £7,866,000 from other Government Departments as detailed from vi) to x);

ii) A £14,700,000 increase in the provision for Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances;

iii) Provision of £235,000 for the Auditor General for Wales;

iv) An increase in provision of £4,300,000 as a result of the Dearing Review of Higher Education, and

v) The take up of end-year flexibility entitlement of £97,871,000.

There is also an increase in the provision for Welfare to Work of £923,000 as a result of the take up of end-year flexibility entitlement of £789,000. For further information relating to end-year flexibility see the answer given on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*. There is a further transfer of £134,000 from Class 1, Vote 3.

The increase will be offset by transfers from:

vi) Class II, Vote 1 (£7,487,000);

vii) Class III, Votes 2 and 3 (£298,000);

viii) Class VII, Vote 1 (£50,000);

ix) Class XIII, Vote 1 (£-73,000); and

x) Class X, Vote 1 (£104,000).

The balance will be met by a charge on the Departmental Expenditure Limit Reserve for the take-up of the end-year flexibility entitlement, the increase in Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances and the Dearing moneys and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Solicitor-General what proposals there are to change the 1999–2000 Departmental Expenditure Limit and running costs limits for the work of the HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor. [97787]

The Solicitor-General: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class V, Vote 6, the Departmental Expenditure Limit will increase by a net £264,000 from £7,175,000 to £7,439,000 whilst the Department's running cost limit will increase by £28,000 from £4,707,000 to £4,735,000.

The increase in Departmental Expenditure Limit is partially due to an increase in capital expenditure (£236,000) which will be used to continue the expansion of IT systems within the Department. This will be met from end year flexibility provision as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*. A further increase in the Departmental Expenditure Limit (£28,000), which also increases the running cost limit, is due to additional costs associated with the extension of the Attorney-General's powers in referring unduly lenient sentences which fall on this vote. This will be offset by a transfer from the Home Office (Class IV, Vote 1).

All this increase is offset by a transfer and not charged to the Reserve, it will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new enrolments there were in each of the past three years into each of the agricultural colleges; and if he will make a statement. [94441]

Mr. George Howarth: The new enrolments on full-time and part-time courses at DANI Colleges for the last two completed academic years and for the present academic year to mid-October were as follows:

New full-time and part-time enrolments	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Enniskillen College of Agriculture	180	156	[1]155
Greenmount College of Agriculture and Horticulture	368	360	[1]348
Loughrey College—The Food Centre	184	161	[1]204
Total	732	677	[1]707

[1] Enrolments to mid-October—further enrolments on part-time course still expected

Many college courses are of 2, 3 and 4 years duration and the overall student enrolment would be much greater than that indicated above.

In addition to the full-time and part-time courses, the DANI Colleges provide a wide range of short courses of between half a day and 10 days duration for people working in the agri-food industry. The overall enrolment on these courses across the three Colleges for the last three academic years was:

Enrolments on Short Courses at DANI Colleges

1997–98: 7,805

1998–99: 13,031

1999–2000: 10,559.

Policing Review

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the directorships held by each member of the Patten Commission on the Review of Policing in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [94350]

Mr. Ingram: No.

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he *(a)* has established and *(b)* published a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment. [94862]

Mr. George Howarth: In preparation for the new European Union Structural Funds Plan for Northern Ireland 2000–2006, an ex ante appraisal has established baseline data on equal opportunities for men and women. This will be published as part of the documentation for the Plan. In addition to their primary function in relation to the Structural Funds Plan, this data may also be used for future policy appraisal, including impact assessments in relation to the promotion of opportunity, as required by Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

CCTV (Portadown)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in installing closed circuit television cameras in Portadown town centre; and at which locations have these cameras been installed. [95353]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The Royal Ulster Constabulary have advised that, subject to the successful completion of the work, the CCTV scheme in Portadown will be in operation by January 2000. Nine sites have been identified for the installation of cameras. They are:

1. West Street/Mandeville Street
2. Shillington Street/Mandeville Street
3. Woodhouse Street/Market Street
4. Magowan Buildings Car Park
5. William Street/Market Street
6. Pleasure Gardens/Bridge Street
7. Woodhouse Street
8. Bottom of High Street
9. Thomas Street/Market Street.

RUC Guidelines

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidelines are issued to Royal Ulster Constabulary officers in respect of securing and sealing scenes of crime for the purposes of forensic examination where serious assaults have occurred in public places; and if he will place a copy of such guidelines in the Library. [95354]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The RUC provides guidance on the preservation and examination of scenes of crime by way of a Force Order. This is an operational police document and it would therefore be inappropriate to place a copy in the Library.

Crime Clear-up Rates

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the latest available crime clear-up rates, broken down by District Council area, in Northern Ireland. [95891]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* It is not possible to provide the information by District Council area but the following table shows offences recorded and cleared by the RUC as a force, by Region, Division and Sub-Division:

Offences recorded and cleared 1998–99

	Crimes recorded	*Crimes cleared*	*Clearance rate Percentage*
Table 1: Force	76,644	20,711	27.0
Table 2: Region			
Belfast	41,495	10,197	24.6
North	18,692	5,639	30.2
South	16,457	4,875	29.6
Table 3: Division			
A	12,769	3,492	27.3
B	8,737	2,062	23.6
D	12,262	2,872	23.4
E	7,727	1,771	22.9
L	3,989	1,176	29.5
N	5,137	1,525	29.7
O	4,437	1,378	31.1
P	5,129	1,560	30.4
G	5,417	1,440	26.6
H	4,003	1,178	29.4
J	4,590	1,419	30.9
K	2,247	838	34.2
Table 4: Sub-division			
Mountpottinger	2,077	532	25.6
Donegall Pass	3,631	783	21.6
Dunmurry	3,441	745	21.7
Musgrave Street	3,620	1,432	39.6
Grosvenor Road	2,346	567	24.2
Lisburn	2,801	836	29.8
Woodbourne	3,590	659	18.4
North Queen Street	2,019	457	22.6
Antrim Road	1,840	433	23.5
Antrim	2,139	450	21.0
Newtownabbey	3,034	656	21.6
Carrickfergus	1,476	412	27.9
Tennent Street	1,754	464	26.5
Bangor	3,009	714	23.7
Strandtown	3,041	641	21.1
Castlereagh	1,677	416	24.8
Enniskillen	1,261	417	33.1
Lisnaskea	478	175	36.6
Omagh	2,250	584	26.0
Strand Road	2,727	792	29.0
Strabane	1,106	337	30.5
Waterside	1,304	396	30.4
Coleraine	2,654	700	26.4
Limavady	954	385	40.4
Magherafelt	829	293	35.3
Ballymena	2,802	815	29.1
Ballymoney	1,097	339	30.9
Larne	1,230	406	33.0
Newtownards	2,345	614	26.2
Downpatrick	1,812	472	26.0
Newcastle	1,260	354	28.1
Armagh	1,371	391	28.5
Newry	2,632	787	29.9
Portadown	1,333	401	30.1
Lurgan	2,244	700	31.2
Banbridge	1,013	318	31.4
Cookstown	942	338	35.9
Dungannon	1,505	500	33.2

[1] Includes Harbour Police

Note:

Figures shown are under 'old' Home Office counting rules

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Licensing

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason export licence application 6078 was not placed before the interdepartmental licensing committee on 12 October and 18 October; and if he will ensure that the application is processed as a matter of extreme urgency. [96481]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* Export Licence Application 6078 was placed before the relevant interdepartmental committee on 18 October 1999. This application is being considered on its merits under the normal process to allow proper consideration.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantities of spent fuel from Canada have been contracted for reprocessing at Sellafield; when the contracts were agreed; what arrangements exist for the repatriation of the reprocessed plutonium and radioactive waste; when the spent fuel arrived from Canada; and if it has been reprocessed yet. [96467]

Mrs. Liddell: The details and quantities of individual contracts, the timing of fuel deliveries and of reprocessing for specific customers as well as the detailed arrangements for returning plutonium and wastes to the country of origin are commercial and operational matters for BNFL and its customers. In understand from BNFL, however, that BNFL concluded a contract to reprocess a quantity of Canadian spent fuel in 1970 and that fuel covered by this contract has been delivered to Sellafield. Since 1976 all BNFL's contracts for reprocessing overseas spent fuel have contained options for the return of wastes to the country of origin. The Government's policy is that these options should be exercised. BNFL's overseas reprocessing contracts concluded prior to 1976 do not contain return of waste options.

Indonesia

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of ECGD cover has been provided in relation to arms sales to Indonesia for each of the three most recent years for which there are records. [96586]

Mr. Caborn: From the latest statistics available the value of defence related export credits to Indonesia for each of the past three years is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	144
1997–98	17
1998–99	9

These figures include all ECGD covered business with defence buyers, including sales of non-lethal equipment.

Arms Sales

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks are made and controls imposed by his Department on arms manufacturers and arms brokers before they are granted permission to advertise on his Department's website. [97389]

Mr. Caborn: British Trade International brings together the joint work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Trade and Industry in support of UK trade and investment overseas and its TradeUK Internet website(www.tradeuk.com) has been created to help put UK suppliers in touch with overseas buyers. Over 57,000 firms are currently listed. The majority of UK firms' contact data is used under licence from a commercial database source but firms can also submit their own entries. Our current policy is to allow any firm in any sector involved in exporting for the UK to be listed, free of charge, on the TradeUK National Exporters Database. These firms are responsible for the information they supply and for its accuracy. It is clearly not in their interest to promote goods for which an export licence would not be granted. We are reviewing the guidance we provide to UK firms both in the TradeUK application form and on the website to make clear the need to comply with current export control legislation. We are also reviewing operational procedures with the TradeUK contractor.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about his plans for processing applications for regional selective assistance within the existing assisted areas map which is due to be replaced on 1 January 2000 in accordance with the EU Guidelines on Regional State Aid. [97784]

Mr. Caborn: Under the European Commission's new regional aid guidelines all offers of Regional Selective Assistance under the existing Assisted Area map must be made by 31 December 1999. In order, therefore, to allow sufficient time for the processing of cases, no new applications for Regional Selective Assistance under the existing map will be accepted after 17.00 hours on 30 November 1999. This cut-off date will apply to applications across the whole of the GB map.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes will be made to the departmental expenditure limits and running cost limits for his Department, the Office for Telecommunications, the Office of Gas Supply and the Office of Electricity Regulation. [97781]

Mr. Byers: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estate, the voted element of the Departmental Expenditure Limit for the Department of Trade and Industry will be increased by £53,901,000 from £3,127,781,000 to £3,181,682,000. This increase, which will be made to the net provision of Class IX Vote 1, results from:

(i) the take up of End Year Flexibility entitlements of £42,192,000, comprising £2,966,000 for capital, £9,226,000 for running costs and £30,000,000 for current expenditure, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*;

(ii) the take up of the Department Unallocated Provision of £5,000,000;

(iii) the provision of £8,000,000 from the Reserve for a payment to the Post Office for Horizon re-negotiation costs;

(iv) the transfer of £250,000 in programme costs and £205,000 in running costs from the Home Office (Class IV Vote 1) as part of the Crime Reduction Programme;
offset by:

(v) the transfer of £1,096,000 to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Class III Vote 1) to cover the administrative costs of the Regional Development Agencies;

(vi) the transfer of £500,000 to Northern Ireland in respect of the SMART scheme;

(vii) the transfer of £150,000 to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Class X Vote 2) for the enforcement of the National Minimum Wage in the agricultural sector.

Within this total the gross running costs limit will be increased by £14,994,000 from £373,606,000 to £388,600,000, which will include £5,563,000 transferred from the capital computer budget in respect of the Elgar Private Finance Initiative project.

The take up of the End Year Flexibility entitlements of £42,192,000 and the £8,000,000 for the payment to the Post Office will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Also, subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department Expenditure Limit of Class IX Vote 8—the Office of Telecommunications—will be increased by £2,140,000 from £1,000 to £2,141,000 and the gross running costs limit will be increased by £635,000 from £11,661,000 to £12,296,000. These increases result from the take up of End Year Flexibility entitlements of £1,426,000, comprising £791,000 for capital, £635,000 for running costs, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*, and a reduction of £714,000 in appropriations in aid as a result of the adoption of the Telecommunications Licensing Directive, under which certain statutory responsibilities can no longer be met from licence fees. The increase in net provision will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Additionally, subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Departmental Expenditure Limit for Class IX Vote 9—the Office of Gas Supply—will be increased by £1,000 from £1,000 to £2,000 and the gross running costs limit will be increased by £1,830,000 from £12,000,000 to £13,830,000. An increase in running costs provision of £2,370,000 is necessary to cover the Office of Gas Supply's administrative costs preparatory to the merger with the Office of Electricity Regulation. An increase in VAT refunds arising from the increase in the gross expenditure provision reduces the increase in the gross running costs limit to £1,830,000, of which £30,000 represents the take up of End Year Flexibility. The total increase in expenditure of £3,300,000 is offset by additional receipts of £3,299,000, of which £1,200,000 represents VAT refunds and a £1,800,000 payment from DTI. The increase in net provision will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

In addition, subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Departmental Expenditure Limit for Class IX Vote 10—the Office of Electricity Regulation—will be increased by £86,000 from £1,000 to £87,000 and the gross running costs limit will be increased by £1,800,000 from £28,200,000 to £30,000,000. An increase in running costs provision of £3,375,000 and in capital expenditure provision of £886,000 is necessary to cover the Office of Electricity Regulation's administrative costs preparatory to the merger with the Office of Gas Supply. An increase in VAT refunds arising from the increase in the gross expenditure provision reduces the increase in the gross running costs limit to £1,800,000 and the Office of Electricity Regulation will also take up End Year Flexibility entitlements of £86,000. Additional receipts of £4,175,000, of which £1,400,000 will come from VAT refunds and the balance from electricity licence fees, will not fully meet the increase in gross provision. The shortfall is due to the requirement to reduce electricity licence fees in 1999–2000 by the amount overrecovered in 1998–99 and the take up of End Year Flexibility. The increase in net provision will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Horizontal Questions Working Group

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those proposals examined by the Horizontal Questions Working Group over the past 12 months. [97147]

Mr. Caborn: The Horizontal Questions Working Group has discussed a wide range of topics concerning the Single Market over the past 12 months including:

Joint Work Programme of the three Presidencies (October 1998 and June 1999),

Single Market Action Plan and plans for a new Single Market Strategy;

The Karolus Programme of personnel exchanges between member states;

Better regulation issues such as the Euro Business Test Panel and SLIM (Simplification of Legislation in the Internal Market);

Cardiff Economic Reform Process;

Integration of environmental aspects in the Internal Market;

The application of the principle of mutual recognition of one member state's rules, standards and qualifications by another.

Distant Water Trawlermen

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department and MAFF have completed their joint report on compensation for distant water trawlermen. [96902]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* This matter remains under active consideration by Ministers.

Packaging

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will estimate the cost to United Kingdom companies of increasing recovery targets from 50 per cent. to 75 per cent. as contained in the European Union's Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste; [97474]

(2) what assessment he has made of the European Commission draft review of the European Union Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste; and if he will make a statement. [97473]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are assessing the possible overall costs and benefits of the European Commission's early suggestions for revising EC Directive 94/62 on Packaging and Packaging Waste, including the suggestion to increase the targets from 50 per cent. to 75 per cent. At present, there is significant uncertainty about the possible costs and benefits. Both Departments are therefore consulting businesses and other interested parties in order to gather better information and data. This will enable the Government to prepare a Regulatory Impact Assessment to accompany the Explanatory Memorandum which will be submitted to Parliament when a European Commission proposal is published.

US National Ignition Facility

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution the UK Government are making to the USA National Ignition Facility project at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories in California. [96436]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to my predecessor's response on 5 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns *340–41*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) to which I have nothing to add.

Hush-kit Aircraft

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about what discussions he has had with his US counterpart about the use of hush-kit aircraft in the UK. [96924]

Mr. Mullin: I have been asked to reply.

The Deputy Prime Minister met the US Secretary for Transport Rodney Slater on 20 April. Officials in my Department have maintained contacts since then. Discussions about the use of hush-kit aircraft in the EU are continuing in various forums.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to ensure that the Benefits Agency has publicised the consequences of changes to benefit and pension entitlements over the last 14 years. [97308]

Mr. Rooker: The Benefits Agency keeps its published information as up to date and accurate as possible. A specific review of all Benefits Agency leaflets, outstanding legislative changes and guidance to staff on decision making was undertaken earlier this year.

Council Tax Bills

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate, based on his Department's Family Resources Survey, for each of the last five financial years, the average level of *(a)* gross council tax bills and *(b)* net council tax bills as a percentage of household income, for the whole population and separately for pensioner and non-pensioner households. [96676]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Average Council Tax Bill as a percentage of average gross household income, by household type and year

	Pensioner households		*Non-pensioner households*		*All households*	
	gross	*net*	*gross*	*net*	*gross*	*net*
1994–95	3.7	3.1	2.0	1.8	2.3	2.1
1995–96	3.7	3.1	2.0	1.8	2.3	2.1
1996–97	3.8	3.3	2.0	1.9	2.4	2.1
1997–98	3.9	3.4	2.1	1.9	2.4	2.2

Notes:

1. Gross Council Tax is taken to be net of Council Tax discount but prior to any deductions to the bill resulting from the receipt of Council Tax Benefit.
2. Net Council Tax is taken to be Gross Council Tax as defined above, minus any Council Tax Benefit for which any member of the household is eligible.
3. A pensioner household is a household that contains at least one adult of State Pension age or above.
4. A non-pensioner household is one in which all adults are below State Pension age.
5. Those households who do not pay Council Tax (such as students) have not been included in this analysis.
6. The estimates are based on sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors that control for region, Council Tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.
7. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.

Source:

Family Resources Survey (Great Britain). The earliest and latest financial years for which data is available are 1994–95 and 1997–98 respectively.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94976]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its PSA, and the measures of success it will use in the Output and Performance Analyses (OPA) published in March this year.

In addition, the Secretary of State sets annual targets for the Department's agencies. These targets are announced to Parliament by means of a written Parliamentary Question. A full list of the targets and target dates for the Department's agencies can be found in the Next Steps Report and in individual agency Business Plans. Performance against targets is also reported in agencies' Annual Reports. Copies of these documents can be found in the Library.

These high level targets are supported at operational level by numerous other internal targets, in order to ensure delivery by individual units. Listing these targets would be inappropriate and would incur disproportionate cost.

Benefits (Annual Uprating)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the shortest possible time between announcement and implementation of the annual uprating of benefits. [97556]

Angela Eagle: The Benefits Agency has a well established uprating plan that is currently based on the uprating announcement being made by late November/early December.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there are any proposals to amend his Department's departmental expenditure limit and running cost limits for 1999–2000. [97786]

Dr. Reid: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XIII, Vote I Scotland and Transfers to the Scottish Consolidated Fund, the Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000 will be increased by £314,030,000 from £13,809,474,000 to £14,123,504,000.

The increase will be offset by transfers of £6,074,000 from Environment, Transport and the Regions (Class III), of £73,000 from Wales (Class XIV), a net transfer of £1,259,000 from the Department of Social Security (Class XII), £1,177,000 to the Department of Health (Class IV), of £5,067,000 to Home Office (Class IV), of £957,000 to Education and Employment (Class I), the take up of end year flexibility as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*, of £314,245,000 and £150,000 for The Giving Age. In addition responsibility for the expenditure of £170,000 relating to the Scottish Parliamentary Boundary Commission will transfer from the Scottish Executive to the Scotland Office and will be shown in Section F of Class XIII, Vote 1.

The running costs limit for the Scotland Office will be increased by £1,760,000 from £2,455,000 to £4,215,000 following a review of the administrative support required for the Secretary of State for Scotland. The increases will be offset by transfers and a charge on the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

DEFENCE

Multi-role Armoured Vehicle

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle programme. [97922]

Mr. Hoon: I am pleased to announce that the UK and Germany today signed a contract with ARTEC GmbH, a consortium including Alvis Vehicles Ltd. from the UK, for the development of a family of armoured utility vehicles, known in the UK as the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle (MRAV). The MRAV programme will provide the British Army with a modern and flexible family of armoured utility vehicles that can operate in both high intensity conflict and in rapid response peace support and humanitarian operations world-wide.

The contract represents a major step forward in European co-operation in armoured vehicles, and will be procured through the quadrilateral Organisation for Joint Armaments Cooperation known as OCCAR. This contract will help secure up to 500 manufacturing jobs within the UK supplier base over the life of the programme, the majority of which will be in the Telford area.

Landing Craft Utility Mk 10 Vessels

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the cost of the Landing Craft Utility Mk 10 programme; and if he will make a statement; [95799]

(2) what are the delivery dates for the production series Landing Craft Utility Mk 10 vessels. [95798]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The current delivery dates for the production of Landing Craft Utility (LCU) Mk 10 vessels are:

Delivery date	*Mk 10 vessel*
2001	
14 December	LCU 03
14 December	LCU 04
2002	
31 March	LCU 05
31 May	LCU 06
31 August	LCU 07
31 October	LCU 08
31 December	LCU 09
2003	
28 February	LCU 10

In addition to these vessels, two prototype vessels will have delivery dates of 25 November this year.

The current cost of the LCU Mk 10 programme is £35 million.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the manufacture, purchase, deployment and export of *(a)* cluster bombs and *(b)* munitions containing depleted uranium; and if he will make a statement. [95677]

Mr. Hoon: Cluster bombs and depleted uranium (DU)-based ammunition are purchased for the UK armed forces because they are currently the most effective weapons available to satisfy the military requirements for which they are deployed. Cluster bombs are used against armoured and soft-skinned vehicles, artillery, surface to air missile sites, anti-aircraft artillery or forces on the ground. DU-based ammunition is used because of its unique capability as a kinetic penetrator. It offers a significant operational advantage over all currently available alternative materials.

Any applications for a licence to export these equipments are considered against the criteria which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced to the House on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, and the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports.

Kosovo

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on whether uranium-tipped weapons were used in Kosovo. [95865]

Mr. Hoon: I can confirm that depleted uranium-based munitions were used by NATO forces during the Kosovo campaign.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to assist in the removal of undetonated land mines from Kosovo. [95973]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Since KFOR deployed, the UK has undertaken a great deal of work to ensure that Kosovo is made safe from unexploded ordnance (UXO) including undetonated Serbian land mines. The British Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams in Kosovo have been closely involved in marking minefields and clearing unexploded ordnance where it presents an immediate threat to life. All such sites in the UK-led sector of Kosovo have now been marked. KFOR as a whole has now cleared over 4,400 Serbian anti-personnel mines and 2,300 anti-tank mines.

Western European Union

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what existing WEU agreements with NATO will be incorporated into the EU. [96971]

Mr. Hoon: A decision on agreements with NATO that will allow the EU to assume its responsibilities in respect of a Common Security and Defence policy is not expected until the end of the 2000—the timeframe agreed at the European Council meeting in June this year.

Arms Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed in his Department in examining arms export licence applications. [97059]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Thirty people are currently employed full time in my Department examining export and promotion applications for military and dual-use items, and around a further fifty are involved on a regular basis as part of their duties. In addition, other staff may become involved as required.

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the health and safety incidents which have occurred at AWE Aldermaston since 1 October. [96986]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* The data for October 1999 are still being compiled for inclusion in the fourth of AWE's quarterly Environment, Safety and Health Reports for 1999, produced as part of their normal procedures for informing the Local Liaison Committee (LLC). I will place a copy of that report in the Library of the House as soon as it is available. I will also place a copy of the first quarter's report in the Library of the House along with copies of the second and third quarters' reports, due for release to the LLC on 10 November, as soon as they become available.

Chinook Crash (Mull of Kintyre)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received in the last 12 months on the RAF Chinook helicopter crash on Mull of Kintyre in 1994. [97235]

Mr. Spellar: In the past 12 months there have been 40 parliamentary questions, 63 parliamentary inquires, an Early Day Motion and a short debate in the House of Lords. Some of these made representations and some sought information, which my Department was pleased to provide.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

EU Directive (Mineral Extracting Industries)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if regulations required under EU Directive 92/104/EEC (O.J. No. L404, 31.12.92, p.10) regarding health and safety of workers in the mineral extracting industries have been published in all EU member states; and if he will list those regulations together with their proposed implementation dates. [96456]

Mr. Meacher: EU Directive 92/104/EEC has been implemented in the United Kingdom. Many of its provisions were covered in existing law. Those that were not, were implemented by:

The Mines Miscellaneous Health and Safety Provisions Regulations 1995 (SI 1995 No. 2005);

The Mines Miscellaneous Health and Safety Provisions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (SR 1995 No. 379);

The Quarries Miscellaneous Health and Safety Provisions Regulations 1995 (SI 1995 No. 2036);

The Quarries Miscellaneous Health and Safety Provisions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (SR 1995 No. 378);

The Escape and Rescue from Mines Regulations 1995 (SI 1995 No. 2870); and

The Escape and Rescue from Mines Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 (SR 1999 No. 173).

It is for the European Commission to monitor the transposition of EU Directives across the Community and take appropriate action as necessary. The Commission publishes information on which Directives have been transposed on its CELEX database. This can be accessed on the parliamentary intranet at the House of Commons Library.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to update existing legislation on SSSIs. [96524]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are committed to introducing legislation to improve the protection and management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. We will take action as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase the penalties for those who breach the regulations governing SSSIs. [96592]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are examining the level of penalties for damaging an SSSI, and has proposed that the Court should be able to impose unlimited fines where this is appropriate. We will take action as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Regional Air Services Study

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* groups and *(b)* organisations will be consulted during the south east-and east of England Regional Air Services Study. [97478]

Mr. Mullin: The proposed Terms of Reference for the south-east and east of England Regional Air Services Study were published on 30 September 1999. Over 1,000 copies were distributed to interested individuals and organisations, all of whom were invited to comment. 250 have done so to date.

An external reference Group has been set up to provide validation of the approach adopted by the study team and a source of expertise on a wide range of issues. Membership of the Group includes, among others, representatives from the aviation industry, local government organisations, environmental groups and business interests. A full list of participants is available if required.

The south-east and east of England Regional Air Services Study is expected to take around two years to complete and will be followed by extensive public consultation on options arising from it.

Gatwick Airport

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when BAA submitted the result of their feasibility study into a second runway at Gatwick to his Department; and if he will publish its findings. [97475]

Mr. Mullin: BAA did not complete their study, which the previous administration had asked them to undertake, of less environmentally damaging runway options, such as a close parallel runway at Gatwick. We announced on 19 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *372*, that we had asked BAA to put this work on hold so that we could review the issue in light of the integrated transport White Paper.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money has been spent through the Single Regeneration Budget in each of the last five years *(a)* in England as a whole and *(b)* in rural England. [97238]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The total amount spent in England through the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) since the programme began in 1995–96 is given in the table. It is not possible to break down the national expenditure totals to show how much has been spent on schemes in rural areas. However, under Round 5 of the SRB (the first round in which Regional Development Agencies were involved) more than one billion pounds was awarded to SRB Partnerships over the next seven years, of which it is estimated some 7 per cent. will go to wholly rural schemes or the rural parts of mixed area schemes.

Total SRB expenditure: England

Year	*£ million*
1995–96	136.4
1996–97	277.5
1997–98	458.8
1998–99	560.0
1999–2000	[1]714.1

[1] Estimated

Pesticide Tax

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent discussions his Department has had with trade representatives over the proposed pesticide tax. [97255]

Mr. Mullin: A consultants' report on the design of a tax or charge scheme for pesticides was put out to public consultation in March this year with an invitation to submit comments to the Treasury by June. Since then, I am not aware that my Department has held any meetings with trade representatives on this issue. Tax matters are of course the responsibility of the Chancellor.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if there are any proposals to amend his departmental expenditure limits and running costs limits for 1999–2000. [97830]

Mr. Prescott: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates for Class III, Votes 1, 2, 6, 8 and 11, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Departmental Expenditure Limits for 1999–2000 will change as follows. All references to the take-up of end year flexibility refer to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury's announcement of 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*.

(i) The DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £542,447,000 from £9,692,857,000 to £10,235,305,000. This increase reflects the net impact of a take-up of end year flexibility of £400,755,000; transfers out of the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit of £11,278,000; and a call on the Departmental Expenditure Limit Reserve of £152,970,000. The changes are set out in greater detail below.

(a) The changes for Class III, Vote 1 are as follows: £64,765,000 for expenditure in advance of EC receipts on European Regional Development Fund programmes incurred on behalf of this Department, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Culture, Media and Sports, and the Department for Education and Employment; take up of end year flexibility of £45,684,000 for programmes including the Major Repairs Initiative (£15,180,000), Single Regeneration Budget projects (£4,980,000), Regional Development Agencies (£4,111,000), initiatives in the UK construction industry following the Egan task force report and consultancies in Turkey (£3,750,000) and other smaller programmes (£17,663,000); a transfer of £7,500,000 from the non-Voted element of the DETR Main Programmes

Departmental Expenditure Limit due to an increase in demand for disabled facilities grants; a transfer of £1,096,000 from Class IX, Vote 1 (Department of Trade and Industry: programmes and administration) to cover ex-Department of Trade and Industry staff costs in Regional Development Agencies; and a reduction of £6,009,000 as a result of the cash limit breach on Class VI, Vote 4 in 1998–99. A transfer of £8,978,000 from the DETR Departmental Unallocated Provision will be made to cover the rationalisation of the inherited sub-regional office structure and costs associated with ex-Departmental staff in Regional Development Agencies. There will also be inter-vote transfers of £72,900,000 to Class III, Vote 6 (Transport industries) to provide additional funding for London Transport and to reflect the transfer of responsibility within the Department for the Docklands Light Railway.

(b) The changes for Class III, Vote 2 are as follows: inter-vote transfers of £5,944,000 from Class III, Vote 8 (Highways Agency) for multi modal studies and road user charging research; £94,000 from Class III, Vote 3 (Environmental protection and water) for work on petrol and diesel emissions testing; and £9,000 from the non-Voted element of the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit for the National Travel Survey. There are also inter-vote transfers of £500,000 to Class III, Vote 3 (Environmental protection and water) for the Powershift project; £150,000 to Class III, Vote 6 (Transport industries) for a National Bus Summit, the Indian Transport seminar and a consultancy project; £200,000 to Class XIV, Vote 1 (Welsh Office, Secretary of State for Wales and payments to the National Assembly for Wales) for planning expenditure; £203,000 to Class XIII, Vote 1 (Scotland and transfers to the Scottish Consolidated Fund) for a Scottish travel awareness campaign; and £58,000 to Class IX, Vote 1 (Department of Trade and Industry: science) for a research project.

(c) The changes for Class III, Vote 3 are as follows: a transfer of £4,425,000 to Class XIII, Vote 1 (Scotland and transfers to the Scottish Consolidated Fund) for the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme; a transfer of £1,387,000 also to Class XIII, Vote 1 (Scotland and transfers to the Scottish Consolidated Fund) for the work of the Energy Saving Trust; transfers of £48,000 and £44,000 respectively to Class XIV, Vote 1 (Welsh Office, Secretary of State for Wales and payments to the National Assembly for Wales) and Class XIII, Vote 1 (Scotland and transfers to the Scottish Consolidated Fund) for Welsh and Scottish regional energy efficiency publicity work; and a transfer of £94,000 to Class III, Vote 2 (Planning, roads, local transport and vehicle safety) for work on petrol and diesel emission measurement by the Transport Research Laboratory. There are also inter-vote transfers from Class III, Vote 2 (Planning, roads, local transport and vehicle safety) of £500,000 to the Powershift project; £1,200,000 from Class III, Vote 8 (Highways Agency) for the Powershift project; and a transfer of £2,400,000 from the DETR Departmental Unallocated Provision to meet demand led pressures on the Pneumoconiosis compensation scheme.

(d) The changes for Class III, Vote 6 are as follows: an agreed claim on the Reserve of £152,970,000 to provide for payment of compensation to the National Bus Company Pension Scheme fund; take-up of £290,306,000 of end year flexibility to provide additional funding for London Transport, the Marchioness public inquiry, increased expenditure by the Marine Accident Investigation Board on Marine Environment High Risk Areas and the Docklands Light Railway. There will be inter-vote transfers of £150,000 from Class III, Vote 2 (Planning, roads, local transport and vehicle safety) for the National Bus Summit, the Indian Transport seminar and a consultancy project; £72,900,000 from Class III, Vote 1 (Housing, construction, regeneration, regional policy and countryside and wildlife, England) representing additional funding for London Transport and a transfer of responsibility within the Department for the Docklands Light Railway; and a transfer of £1,000,000 to the non-Voted element of the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit for the re-introduction of Supplementary Credit Approvals for local authority ports.

(e) The changes for Class III, Vote 8 are as follows: transfers of £5,944,000 to Class III, Vote 2 (Planning, roads, local transport and vehicle safety) for multi modal studies and road user charging research; a transfer of £1,200,000 to Class III, Vote 3 (Environmental protection and water) for the Powershift project; and an increase in provision of £1,000 to allow for additional Appropriations in Aid to be used.

(f) Provision within the non-Voted element of the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be decreased by £17,887,000 from £1,734,692,000 to £1,716,805,000. This reflects a transfer of £7,500,000 to Class III, Vote 1 (Housing, construction, regeneration, regional policy, and countryside and wildlife, England) due to an increase in demand for disabled facilities grants; and a transfer of £9,000 to Class III, Vote 2 (Planning, roads, local transport and vehicle safety) for the National Travel Survey. It also includes transfers from the DETR Departmental Unallocated Provision of £2,400,000 to Class III, Vote 3 (Environmental protection and water) to meet demand led pressures on the Pneumoconiosis compensation scheme; and of £8,978,000 to Class III, Vote 1 (Housing, construction, regeneration, regional policy and countryside and wildlife, England) to cover the rationalisation of the inherited sub-regional office structure and costs associated with ex-Departmental staff in Regional Development Agencies. There is a transfer of £1,000,000 from Class III, Vote 6 (Transport industries) for the re-introduction of Supplementary Credit Approvals for local authority ports.

The net increase in the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be offset by transfers to the Scotland Departmental Expenditure Limit; to the Wales Departmental Expenditure Limit; from the Department of Trade and Industry Departmental Expenditure Limit; and by a charge on the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

(ii) The Office of the Rail Regulator Departmental Expenditure Limit will increase by £1,133,000 from £1,000 to £1,134,000. This increase reflects the take-up of £1,133,000 running costs end year flexibility to meet increased in-year requirements associated with ongoing consultancy programmes and additional accommodation costs. The running cost limit will be increased by £1,133,000 from £8,900,000 to £10,033,000.

The increase in the Office of the Rail Regulator Departmental Expenditure Limit will be offset by a charge on the DEL Reserve and will therefore not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TREASURY

Pesticide Tax

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions his Department has had with trade representatives over the proposed pesticide tax. [97256]

Mr. Timms: HM Treasury Ministers and officials have held a number of recent discussions with trade representatives on the possible tax on pesticides. I met representatives of the British Agrochemicals Association on 25 October. These discussions, and the responses to the recent consultation on the design of a tax or charge scheme for pesticides, will be taken into account in the Government's consideration of its options.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Customs and Excise departmental expenditure limit or running costs limit for 1999–2000. [97918]

Dawn Primarolo: There are currently no plans to change the overall Departmental Expenditure Limit of HM Customs and Excise. However, subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XVI, Vote 3 (HM Customs and Excise: administration) the Voted element of the Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £14,270,000 from £897,293,000 to £911,563,000. The increase reflects changes arising from a barter deal transaction associated with the award of a PFI contract for the provision of IT services. This increase will be offset by a matching reduction in the non-voted element.

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Office for National Statistics departmental expenditure limit/running cost limit for 1999–2000. [97920]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary Estimate for Class XVI, Vote 11 (Office for National Statistics) the DEL will be increased by £1,000,000 from £110,242,000 to £111,242,000 and the running cost limit by £4,437,000 from £102,208,000 to £106,645,000.

The increase is the net effect of (a) the carry forward of £1,000,000 under the end year flexibility scheme as announced in the House of Commons by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*, and (b) the transfer of £3,437,000 from capital to Running costs due to the implementation of ESA 95 and the 2001 Census Open Options Procurement.

The net increase will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Treasury's departmental expenditure limit and running costs limits for 1999–2000. [97921]

Dawn Primarolo: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XVI, Vote 1 (HM Treasury), the Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000 will be increased by £6,328,000 from £140,875,000 to £147,203,000.

The increase is the net effect of the take up of running costs EYF (£2,000,000) to meet the additional costs of the Treasury's planned programme of work; capital EYF (£2,328,000) mainly due to an increased requirement for the Debt Management Office's cash management project; and from the Capital Modernisation Fund (£2,000,000) for the costs of examining policy options in relation to the Partnerships UK and for work associated with the passage of the Bill which will establish this new body.

The running costs limit for HM Treasury will accordingly be increased by £11,748,000 from £56,965,000 to £68,713,000. The increase is mainly for work leading to the creation of Partnerships UK and the Office of Government Commerce, a direct recruitment campaign, consultancy costs on the project to refurbish the Treasury Building, the costs of the Public Services Productivity Panel, and a small increase for the Debt Management Office.

The increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the proceeds of the climate change levy will be used to encourage energy-saving measures. [96959]

Mr. Timms: In the March 1999 Budget it was announced that £50 million of the revenues from the £1.75 billion climate change levy would be used to provide direct additional support for energy efficiency measures and renewables, with the remaining £1.7 billion being recycled to business through a cut in employers' National Insurance Contributions. This additional support for energy efficiency measures represents a step change in the level of support provided by existing schemes.

HEALTH

New Hospital (Edgware)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will make a decision on the plan to build a new hospital at Edgware. [94424]

Mr. Denham: Progress is being made by Barnet Healthcare National Health Service Trust on the completion of a full business case for this important development which will be progressed in line with the normal NHS planning process. A decision will follow completion of the business case.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Immunisation

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions he has taken to achieve 95 per cent. population coverage for measles, mumps and rubella immunisation. [96257]

Mr. Hutton: We have set a national target of 95 per cent. coverage for the routine childhood immunisations (including MMR) by age 2. Adverse publicity about the safety of MMR vaccine led to uptake falling from an annual peak of 92 per cent. over the past 3 years. Recent quarterly data from the Public Health Laboratory Service show that this earlier fall appears to have stabilised. For the quarter April to June 1999, 88 per cent. of children at age 2 had received the vaccine (up to 0.4 percentage points on the previous quarter). Most encouragingly, the percentage of children immunised at age 16 months at August 1999 stood at 79.1 per cent., an increase of 3.5 percentage points on April 1999.

Our recommendations on immunisation are based upon the advice of independent experts. All new evidence on the safety of MMR vaccine is carefully considered by independent groups of scientific and medical experts and subjected to the same rigorous scrutiny as was given to the evidence on which the advice to parents on protecting their children through MMR immunisation is based. The views of these independent experts, as well as those of experts from around the world, including the World Health Organisation, remain unequivocal that there is no evidence of any link between MMR vaccine and inflammatory bowel disease or autism.

We aim to make factually accurate scientific information freely and widely available. As new scientific data has become available—for example, the publication in June of a further two new studies supporting the safety and efficacy of the vaccine and showing no evidence of links to autistic spectrum disorders or bowel problems—this has been widely publicised. The Chief Medical Officer regularly provides health professionals with summaries of the relevant pieces of research emphasising the safety of the vaccine. Ministers have addressed the concerns of the constituents of hon. Members both formally in the House, through correspondence and also through a series of meetings.

The information provided to the public seeks to address anxious parents' calls for factually accurate scientific information and to provide support for doctors dealing with them. In considering what public information to provide, the Department has taken account of research conducted through the Health Education Authority (HEA) on parental attitudes to immunisation and the data on uptake of vaccines provided by the PHLS. The Department's activities on the MMR vaccine reflect the views of parents consulted through this research. The Department has worked with the HEA to provide leaflets for parents, factsheets for professionals and posters for surgeries that have been widely distributed.

Locally, immunisation co-ordinators have been supported with information and material for use in health authority-based campaigns to publicise the facts about MMR vaccine.

The Department will continue to respond promptly to any parental concerns about the vaccine and to make the facts available emphasising that MMR remains the safest way for parents to protect their children against these diseases.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97038]

Mr. Denham: In the Department's resource accounts for the financial year 1999–2000, it is intended that fixed assets will be depreciated using the straight line method i.e. adjustments for changes in price aside, the same amount of depreciation will be charged each year over the life of an asset. This treatment is in line with HM Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual. The requirements in the Manual relating to depreciation methods will be underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15, "Tangible Fixed Assets", issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

Sick Leave

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days off work have been taken by NHS employees each year since 1990 owing to sickness; how much this time off has cost the NHS; how many days off work have been taken by NHS employees each year since 1990 owing to stress; how much this time off has cost the NHS; what assessment he has made of stress levels among staff in the NHS; what proposals he has to reduce stress levels among NHS staff; and if he will make a statement. [97116]

Mr. Denham: According to a survey conducted by the Department in 1998–99 the average sickness absence rate for staff directly employed by National Health Service trusts was 4.6 per cent. This is equivalent to approximately 8 million out of the 176 million days worked each year by National Health Service staff. Details of the survey can be found in Health Service Circular 1999/229: 'Managing Violence, Accidents and Sickness Absence in the NHS' copies of which are available in the Library. Similar information for earlier years, and information about the overall cost and causes of sick leave, is not collected centrally, but may be held locally by individual National Health Service employers. We have agreed improvement targets for health authorities and NHS trusts to 'achieve year on year improvement in sickness absence rates' of 20 per cent. by 2001 and 30 per cent. by 2003.

The management of sickness absence in the National Health Service is being monitored by the Department's Public Sector Productivity Panel. The aim is to identify the most efficient and effective ways to secure a successful approach to improving attendance in the NHS. The project will report in February 2000.

The report of the Partnership for the Health of the National Health Service Workforce, chaired by the Nuffield Trust, identified that 10,000 working days are lost each year through medically certified mental illness, including stress related illness, in the NHS. The NHS

Executive has issued a range of guidance aimed at improving the quality of working life for staff, including tackling violence, the provision of counselling services, improved health and safety and access to occupational health services.

NHS (Funding)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the correspondence between his predecessor and the former Chief Secretary during the last six months on the adequacy of the resources for the NHS. [97223]

Mr. Hutton: All correspondence between Cabinet Ministers is confidential, as is made clear in the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mental Health Act

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England are receiving services under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983. [97289]

Mr. Hutton: 27,100 people were formally admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983 in 1998–99. Information on after-care services provided under section 117 of the Act is not held centrally. This is a matter for local and health authorities.

Commercial Sponsorship

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to reject NICE recommendations for further commercially sponsored clinical trials in circumstances where his Department has already ruled out such trials as uneconomic. [97309]

Mr. Denham: The decision to fund, or not to fund a piece of research should continue to be taken case by case, but ultimately by the research funding body in question in accordance with their particular remit.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many food poisoning cases in each of the last five years have been attributed to cheese made from *(a)* pasteurised and *(b)* unpasteurised milk; and what proportion of the total number of cases they represent. [97310]

Ms Stuart: Most cases of food poisoning are sporadic and in such cases it is usually impossible to identify a source for the infection. Even in the case of outbreaks, it is sometimes not possible to identify the source. Details of cases of food poisoning and the likely sources of infection identified are collected by the Public Health Laboratory Service and published in CDR Weekly.

The number of cases of food poisoning where the sole vehicle identified has been cheese made from pasteurised and unpasteurised milk (the latter representing less than 1 per cent. of all cheeses manufactured) is set out in the table. Since these figures are based on laboratory reports they cannot be related to food poisoning figures based on statutory notifications. Data for 1994 and 1995 are unavailable.

	1996	*1997*
Cheese made with pasteurised milk identified as the source of infection	91	—
Cheese made with unpasteurised milk identified as the source of infection	—	5

Note:
Figures for 1998 are not yet available

Mental Health Spending

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his Department's criteria for distributing the additional funds recently announced for increasing spending on mental health. [97257]

Mr. Hutton: Three main principles were used to guide the allocation of funds for the first tranche of new investment in 1999–2000:

An assessment of need, assessed partly by the weighted population score for each health authority (based on population, size, deprivation indices and other factors)

Evidence concerning the gaps in services gathered during a review of mental health services in 1996–97

The vision for safe, sound and supportive services described in the Government's strategy "Modernising Mental Health Services".

Criteria to be used for allocating funds in the next two years have yet to be decided.

Patient Eligibility (Criteria)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria his Department uses to decide whether a patient is ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and thus entitled to free treatment on the NHS. [97262]

Mr. Denham: Eligibility for free hospital treatment depends mainly on residence in the United Kingdom. With some exceptions, for example in accident and emergency departments, all new patients are asked if they have been living in the United Kingdom for the previous 12 months. Patients who have done so, with up to no more than three months absence during that time, will be eligible. Patients who have not lived in the United Kingdom for 12 months may still be eligible if either they are exempt from charges by virtue of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989 or, following a House of Lords ruling, if they can demonstrate that they are lawfully in the United Kingdom for a settled, identifiable purpose. It is unlikely that anyone intending to stay for less than six months would fulfil this criteria.

General practitioners are encouraged to consider residency before accepting a patient for National Health Service treatment but are not bound by the same regulations. Under the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992 a GP does not have to accept any patient for NHS treatment unless specifically allocated by a health authority. The GP's decision does not automatically exempt the patient from charges for hospital treatment they may subsequently need.

Departmental Assets

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the assets sold by his Department together with

their values in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99; and if he will estimate the value of assets planned to be sold in 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [96274]

Mr. Denham: Although information on individual sales of assets disposed of by the Department is not held centrally, the following information is available and relates to assets owned directly by the department:

(a) The total income from disposal of NHS assets between 1991–92 and 1998–99 is in the table.

Capital receipts—NHS assets

Year	*£ million*
1991–92	169
1992–93	115
1993–94	213
1994–95	208
1995–96	282
1996–97	393
1997–98	471
1998–99	500

(b) Current forecast income from the disposal of NHS assets for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 and is in the table.

Current forecast income from disposal of NHS assets

Year	*£ million*
1999–2000	337
2000–01	363

Note:
In this period, there were, and are expected to be, no significant disposals of non-National Health Service assets and information on minor or routine disposals could be ascertained only at disproportionate cost.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals there are to amend the departmental expenditure limit and running costs limit for 1999–2000. [97923]

Mr. Lock: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class V, Vote 1 the Lord Chancellor's Department Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000 will be increased by £100,000 from £2,421,144,000 to £2,421,244,000. The increase is the effect of a transfer for £100,000 from the Home Office, relating to legal aid costs in respect of reducing volatile substance abuse—gas lighter refills.

The running costs limit for the Lord Chancellor's Department will be increased by £5,386,000 from £496,817,000 to £502,203,000. The increase is in respect of funding for PFI projects in the civil courts and tribunals. This overall increase includes a reduction of £667,000 to gross running costs, with a matching reduction to running costs receipts in respect of a penalty for the running cost breach which occurred in 1998–99.

The increases will be offset by a transfer from the Home Office Departmental Expenditure Limit, as well as receipts arising from asset disposals and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Audit Commission

Mr. Field: To ask the President of the Council from what date hon. Members have been expected to pay for Audit Commission reports. [97142]

Mrs. Beckett: Hon. Members can obtain copies of Audit Commission reports, free of charge, from the Vote Office, through the usual procedures.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Council what proposals she has for the Scottish Grand Committee to meet in Scotland. [97586]

Mrs. Beckett: No decisions have been taken about possible sittings of the Grand Committees next session.

The Grand Committee is a useful mechanism for Scottish MPs to highlight UK-wide policies which have an impact in Scotland. As the hon. Member may be aware, in the Government's response to the Procedure Committee's Fourth report on Procedural Consequences of Devolution, it recognised that the role and procedure of the Grand Committees would have to be adapted in the light of experience with devolution. Decisions on future meetings will be taken in the light of this.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Reed: To ask the President of the Council if there are any proposals to amend the Privy Council Office Departmental Expenditure Limit/running costs limit for 1999–2000. [97831]

Mrs. Beckett: Subject to approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for Class XVII, Vote 5 will be decreased by £296,000 from £2,166,000 and the running cost limit will be decreased by £296,000 from £2,502,000 to £2,206,000.

The reduction in DEL and running cost limit is the net effect of increases to cover the salary and associated costs of the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office; and to meet the costs arising from my roles as cross Government spokesperson and as Leader of the House, offset by a payment to the Cabinet Office, Class XVII, Vote 1 of £480,000, reflecting the transfer of responsibility for the Lord Privy Seal's Office.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if there are any proposals to amend the Departmental Expenditure Limit and gross running costs limit for 1999–2000. [97783]

Mr. Wills: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates for Class I, Vote 1 (Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services) and Vote 3 (the Employment Service), the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 1999–2000 (excluding Welfare to Work) will be increased by £120,664,000 from £15,671,526,000 to £15,792,190,000.

This overall increase is made up of DEL increases on Votes 1 and 3 of £122,047,000 and £28,617,000 respectively and a decrease of £30,000,000 in non-voted expenditure. As a result, the Voted element of the Departmental Expenditure Limit (excluding Welfare to Work) will be increased by £150,664,000 from £14,396,974,000 to £14,547,638,000 and the non-Voted element will be reduced by £30,000,000 from £1,274,552,000 to £1,244,552,000.

The changes in Vote 1 are the result of the take up of £73,800,000 of the end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*; transfers of £1,425,000 from Class II, Vote 2 (Department of Health) as their contribution to the Healthy Schools programme, of £4,800,000 from Class II, Vote 1 (Department of Health) for the Tomlinson merger of Kings College and the United Medical and Dental School, of £957,000 from the Students Awards Agency for Scotland for changes in the funding of Oxbridge colleges, of £2,122,000 from Class XVII, Vote 1 (Property Advisers to the Civil Estate) relating to Qualifications and Curriculum Authority premises, and of £8,943,000 from Class I, Vote 3 (the Employment Service) for Key Stage 2 revision classes, National trainees and Employment Zones; and the draw down of £30,000,000 from the Department's non-Voted Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) for Adult Basic Skills and Excellence in Cities.

The Employment Service provision has been increased by the take up of £18,022,000 under the capital, £11,300,000 under the running costs and £1,000,000 under the other current end-year flexibility schemes as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*; the transfer of £6,631,000 from Class XII, Vote 3 (Department of Social Security: administration) in respect of work undertaken on behalf of the Benefit Agency and the transfer of £607,000 from Class XVII, Vote 1 (Cabinet Office: administration) to cover the transfer of the lease for 102, New Street, Birmingham; offset by the transfer of £8,943,000 to Vote 1.

The Departmental running costs limit (excluding Welfare to Work) will be increased by £18,538,000 from £1,042,210,000 to £1,060,748,000 as a result of the take up of £11,300,000 of end-year flexibility and the transfers of £6,631,000 from the Department of Social Security and £607,000 from the Cabinet Office. The Supplementary estimates also include a transfer of £128,000 of running costs from Vote 3 to Vote 1 which does not affect the running costs limit.

The Department's Welfare to Work provision is being increased by £38,557,000 from £1,349,816,000 to £1,388,373,000. The increase is made up of changes on Votes 1 and 3 of £39,987,000 and -£1,430,000 respectively. The change on Vote 1 is as the result of the take up of £38,654,000 of end-year flexibility, and transfers of £1,351,000 from Vote 3 and of £18,000 to Class XII, Vote 3 (Department of Social Security: administration) to cover the salary costs of staff supporting the New Deal project. The change on Vote 3 is made up of the transfer of £1,351,000 to Vote 1 and transfers of £134,000 to Class XIV, Vote 1 (Welsh Office) to cover costs of monitoring New Deal training in Wales and of £55,000 from Class XII, Vote 3 (Department of Social Security: administration) for work on the New Deal for the Disabled Innovative Scheme.

The Departmental Welfare to Work running costs limit will be decreased by £378,000 from £162,699,000 to £162,321,000 as a result of the transfer from Vote 1 of £18,000 to the Department of Social Security and the transfers from Vote 3 of £281,000 to Vote 1 for Inspection of New Deal Providers, of £134,000 to the Welsh Office and of £55,000 from the Department of Social Security. The Supplementary estimates also include a transfer of £1,070,000 of Welfare to Work running costs from Vote 3 to Vote 1 which does not affect the running costs limit.

The increases are the result of transfers or will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will undertake a review of funding for people with learning difficulties. [97258]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are committed to providing high quality learning opportunities for people with learning difficulties. We will be publishing a consultation document on the Learning and Skills Council's funding system at the end of the year. It will seek views on the arrangements for funding across the range of the Learning and Skills Council's responsibilities, including the funding arrangements for people with learning difficulties.

University for Industry

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to make the University for Industry learning hubs co-terminus with regional development agency or sub-regional local learning and skills/small business service boundaries; and if he will make a statement. [97056]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* It is Ufl Ltd.'s intention that as far as possible the boundaries of the Ufl hubs will be co-terminus with either sub-regional Learning and Skills Council and Small Business Service boundaries or with local Learning Partnership boundaries. It may not be possible to map this in every case but Ufl Regional Staff are working closely with Ufl hubs to ensure that a high level of coherence is achieved.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he is collecting data on the number of people who leave the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds for employment but subsequently return to jobseeker's allowance after 13 weeks but within *(a)* 26 weeks and *(b)* 52 weeks. [95538]

Ms Jowell: Yes, data are collected on the number of clients who leave the New Deal for 18-to-24 year olds for employment and reclaim jobseeker's allowance both after 13 weeks but before 26 weeks and after 13 weeks but before 52 weeks.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Botswana

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what current proposals she has to assist Botswana. [95737]

Clare Short: We expect to spend around £3 million this year to support national development strategies which focus on helping to ensure an equitable distribution of the nation's wealth.

Main current projects include improvements in sustainable livelihoods by providing better access to, and the use of, natural resources; improvement of the management of resources for primary education; development of distance learning materials, support for the electoral process and development of community policing. Botswana is also a partner in a regional initiative to tackle the spread of HIV/AIDS through increased awareness and improved treatment and prevention systems.

Botswana also benefits through its membership of the South African Development Committee (SADC) from programmes to improve regional integration especially in the areas of HIV/AIDS, trade and customs reform, and improvements in the electoral process.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if there are any proposals to amend the departmental expenditure limit for 1999–2000. [97872]

Clare Short: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class VIII Vote 1, the Department for International Development's Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000 will be decreased by £12,000,000 from £1,804,764,000 to £1,792,764,000. The decrease is the net effect of transferring the Chevening Scholarship Scheme from the Department for International Development to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Democracy Initiatives

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department has spent in each of the past five years in supporting initiatives to build democracy in other countries. [95752]

Mr. Robin Cook: All FCO programme spending is justified in terms of the FCO's objectives. This includes commitment to spreading the values of human rights, civil liberties and democracy, the rule of law and good governance.

The Human Rights Project Fund (HRPF) is the FCO's dedicated fund for human rights projects around the world. Since the inception of HRPF in April 1998 the fund has allocated some £9.7 million to support over 300 projects (£5.05 million in financial year 1998–99 and £4.69 million so far in 1999–2000). Before the HRPF was established there was no comparable funding arrangement for the support of human rights.

The FCO also provides support for democracy building in the form of grant in aid to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which exists to promote democratic development world-wide. In each of the past five years the department has contributed:

Year	*£*
1999–2000	4,000,000
1998–99	3,000,000
1997–98	2,713,650
1996–97	2,500,000
1995–96	2,500,000

Projects under a number of other FCO programmes and budgets contribute to a combination of objectives including, but not exclusively, the promotion of democracy.

Arms Embargoes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the EU has lifted sanctions against Libya while retaining the arms embargo; if the UN has retained an arms embargo; and if he will make a statement on Government policy on such sanctions and embargoes. [97145]

Mr. Hain: UN Sanctions against Libya, including the arms embargo, were suspended on 5 April 1999, following the UN Secretary-General's report to the Council that Libya had complied with the requirements of Security Council resolution 1192 and the Lockerbie accused had arrived in the Netherlands for the purpose of trial.

On 16 April 1999 the EU suspended its measures implementing the UN sanctions. But it left in place EU measures, including an arms embargo, imposed in 1986 in response to Libya's general implication in terrorism. These measures, with the exception of the arms embargo, were lifted on 13 September 1999, in the light of the UN Secretary-General's report of 30 June 1999, in which he cited several elements suggesting that recent acts by the Libyan authorities were indicative of the Libyan Government's renunciation of terrorism. EU member states will keep the question of the arms embargo under review.

The conclusions of a Government review of sanctions were announced to Parliament on 15 March 1999. The review found that sanctions, including arms embargoes, had an important role to play in responding to challenges to international peace and security, and should be tailored to fit the circumstances.

Kashmir

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current human rights situation in Kashmir; and what representations he has made to the Indian Government. [97581]

Mr. Hain: We are concerned about the abuses of human rights which bring suffering to the population of Kashmir, and have urged an improvement. We also call for an end to all external support for violence in Kashmir. The late Derek Fatchett raised the human rights issue with the Indian Home Minister during his visit to India in November last year. Senior officials have raised the issue at various levels.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there are any proposals to amend the departmental expenditure limit/running costs limit for 1999–2000. [97871]

Mr. Hain: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates for Class VII Vote 1 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Departmental Expenditure limit for 1999–2000 will be increased by £59,218,000 from £1,112,022,000 to £1,171,240,000 and the running costs limit has been decreased by £1,000,000 from £531,968,000 to £530,968,000. The increase is the net effect of:

(i) additional provision of £36,702,000 on Section B for UK contributions to United Nations Missions in the former Yugoslavia (includes UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo) and the former Soviet Union, United Nations Special Commission on Iraq, United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission, United Nations Mission for the Referendum on Western Sahara, United Nations Police Mission in Haiti, United Nations Mission in East Timor, United Nations Observe Mission in Angola, United Nations Peacekeeping Operation in Central African Republic, United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone, the United Nations International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Community Monitoring Mission and Western European Union Police Mission in Albania. This is partially offset by a reduction of £1,000,000 in Section A;

(ii) an increase in provision of £3,000,000 to support an independent media in Serbia, civil society in Serbia and to continue the provision of forensic teams to the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia;

(iii) a transfer of £12,000,000 to Section A from DfID (Class VIII, Vote 1), in respect of Chevening Scholarship;

(iv) take up of end year flexibility of £8,516,000 for assistance to Sierra Leone as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to House of Commons on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*.

The increase will be offset by a transfer from another Departmental Expenditure Limit (DfID) and a change on the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Regional Museums

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions about the funding of regional museums. [95135]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* I have not had discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions about the funding of regional museums. However, funding from DCMS is available indirectly through the Area Museums Councils (which received a total of £4 million in 1998–99, most of which was given to individual museums and galleries). Through the Museums and Galleries Commission, the Department provides funds for the PRISM Fund (71 grants worth £292,567 in 1998–99) and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund (227 grants worth £1 million) which assist regional museums in acquiring objects for their collections. For the first time, this Government have been able to provide £15 million over three years (1999–2002) to pre-eminent regional collections through the Designated Museums Challenge Fund.

In addition, the Heritage Lottery Fund supports regional museums through the Capital Grants Programme and the Museums and Galleries Access Fund (£7 million).

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about his powers and responsibilities in relation to regional museums. [95137]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* Apart from the museums sponsored by my Department, Ministers do not have specific powers and responsibilities in relation to regional museums (some of which are independently run, while others are administered by local authorities). The Department's responsibility is to play a strategic role in championing the interests of the museum sector as a whole.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if there are any proposals to amend his Department's expenditure limit and running costs limit for 1999–2000. [97782]

Mr. Chris Smith: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XI, Vote 1, the DCMS Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 1999–2000 will be increased by £2,821,000 from £993,137,000 to £995,958,000 and the running costs limit will be increased by £902,000 from £32,972,000 to £33,874,000.

This is to provide £2,023,000 for minor increases in provision for various sectors of the Vote taking up the DEL end year flexibility on programme expenditure as announced by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*; a transfer of £104,000 to the National Assembly for Wales (Class XIV, Vote 1) in respect of annual grant formerly paid by the Crafts Council to the Arts Council for Wales towards their craft programme; a payment of £281,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry (Class IX, Vote 1) for Sector Challenge funding of tourist projects; a payment of £887,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry (Class IX, Vote 1) for Sector Challenge funding of media projects; and to provide £902,000 for increased expenditure on DCMS running costs in line with the DEL

end year flexibility on running costs expenditure as announced by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*.

The increases will be offset by transfers, savings or a charge on the DEL Reserve, and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Millennium Commission

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in what way the Millennium Commission is promoting its activities around the country. [97212]

Mr. Chris Smith: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will reply to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [96922]

Mr. Chris Smith: In accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual and with Financial Reporting Standard 15: Tangible Fixed Assets, issued by the Accounting Standards Board, my Department has adopted the following methods of depreciation.

Depreciation is applied at rates calculated to write off the value of freehold buildings and other tangible fixed assets by equal instalments over their estimated useful lives. Lives are in the following ranges:

Buildings—up to 75 years

Leasehold Improvements—the term of the lease

Equipment and Computers—3–10 years

Fixtures and Fittings—3–20 years

Intangible Assets—1 year.

Freehold land is not depreciated.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proposals there are to change the 1999–2000 Departmental Expenditure Limit or running costs limits for the Cabinet Office. [97833]

Marjorie Mowlam: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for the Cabinet office will be increased by £16,881,000 from £301,820,000 to £318,701,000 and the running costs limit has been increased by £5,122,000 to £115,018,000.

The increase is mainly to take account of the following:

(a) A transfer payment has been received from the Privy Council (Class XVII, Vote 5) (£480,000) for responsibility of Lord Privy Seal and from the Department of Social Security (Class XII, Vote 3) (£1,670,000) to provide for the Women's Unit and Women's National Commission. Provision for ownership of properties (£2,729,000) has transferred from the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate to Department for Education and Employment (Class I, Vote 1 and Class I, Vote 3).

(b) The Cabinet Office has taken end year flexibility (£12,000,000) as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*, and remaining Departmental Unallocated provision (£340,000). This is to meet increased anticipated spend on disposing of the vacant Civil Estate and modernisation of government programme, including E-Envoy and Central Internet Strategy Unit.

(c) Increased provision (£5,000,000) for the autumn campaign raising awareness about Year 2000 millennium bug.

(d) Unanticipated expenditure (£120,000) in connection with NATO alliance in Kosovo.

The increase will be offset by transfer or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for changes to the 1999–2000 departmental expenditure limits and running cost limits within his responsibility. [97832]

Mr. Straw: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £11,319,000 from £7,752,125,000 to £7,763,444,000. The running cost limit will be increased by £1,561,000 from £2,136,392,000 to £2,137,953,000. A separate running cost limit of £163,000 will be established for expenditure on Welfare to Work.

The changes in Class IV, Vote 1 are the net effect of the following transfers: £455,000 to the Department of Trade and Industry (Class IX, Vote 1), £50,000 to the Welsh Assembly (Class XIV, Vote 1), £1,499,000 to Prison Service (Class IV, Vote 2) in respect of the Crime Reduction Programme; £100,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V, Vote 1) in respect of a new offence to reduce volatile substance abuse; £28,000 to the Treasury Solicitors (Class V, Vote VI) in relation to extending the Attorney-General's powers on unduly lenient sentences; £700,000 from the DEL Reserve in respect of a contribution to the Active Community Initiative; £10,000 to Department of Health (Class II, Vote II) as contribution towards a research programme; Neutral payment of £3,000,000 from the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V, Vote 1) in respect of the Confiscated Assets Fund; £15,000 to the Prison Service (Class IV, Vote II) in respect of secondment costs; £5,067,000 from the Scottish Office (Class XIII, Vote 5) in respect of the balance due following a reduction in the level of contribution by the Scottish Office (Class XIII, Vote 5) in respect of the balance due following a reduction in the level of contribution by the Scottish Office towards Criminal Injuries administration and compensation costs from 13 per cent. to 11 per cent.; £7,000,000 from the DEL Reserve in respect of

administration costs for the Asylum Seekers Directorate; £305,000 to the Department of Health (Class II, Vote II) in respect of drugs related research; Neutral payments of £100,000 from the Department of Health, £100,000 from the Department for Education and Employment, £100,000 from the Lord Chancellor's Department and £36,000 from the Welsh Assembly in respect of a contribution towards grant in aid for the National Family and Parenting Institute; Neutral payment of £12,000 from the Cabinet Office in respect of contribution towards grant in aid for Youth Net.

The changes in Class IV, Vote 2 are the net effect of the following transfers: £500,000 to the Department of Health (Class II, Vote 2) for the running costs of the Prison Health Policy Unit and the Prison Health Task Force; £1,499,000 from the Home Office (Class IV, Vote 1) in respect of the Crime Reduction Programme; and £15,000 from the Home Office (Class IV, Vote 1) to cover a secondment to the Mental Health Unit. In addition, the Supplementary Estimate gives effect to the take up of £173,000 for Welfare to Work DEL under the end year flexibility scheme entitlements announced by my right hon. Friend the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*, in reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Ms Lawrence).

The increase in the Department's running costs limit is the net effect of the following transfers: £500,000 to the Department of Health for the running costs of the Prison Health Policy Unit and the Prison Health Task Force; £205,000 to the Department of Trade and Industry and £50,000 to the Welsh Assembly in respect of the Crime Reduction Programme; £28,000 to the Treasury Solicitors in relation to extending the Attorney General's powers on unduly lenient sentences; £10,000 to the Department of Health as contribution towards a research programme; £3,000,000 from the DEL Reserve in respect of administration costs for the Asylum Seekers Directorate; transfer of £646,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision to other current expenditure to meet the cost of upgrading the Emergency Communications Network.

These increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the Reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of expenditure.

Immigration and Asylum Bill

Lorna Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the cost of additional staff for the Support Agency described in point 368 of the Explanatory Notes to the Immigration and Asylum Bill was included in point 359; and what the estimated staff costs for the Support Agency are. [97139]

Mrs. Roche: The question refers to paragraphs in the Explanatory Notes, published on 9 February 1999. A further set of Explanatory Notes were published on 18 June 1999 to accompany the introduction of the Immigration and Asylum Bill into the House of Lords.

Paragraph 368 of the Explanatory Memorandum suggested that the Asylum Seekers Support Agency would require between 100–200 additional staff. Since then, further work has been done to identify the appropriate size of the body to administer the new support arrangements. We have also taken account of revised forecasts for applications for asylum. Our latest estimates are that the new body to administer the support arrangements will need 512 full-time equivalent staff.

The costs of the staff were not included in the support costs listed in paragraph 359 of the Explanatory Memorandum. It is now expected that the staff costs will be of the order of £11.5 million per year.

Lorna Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the estimates in point 359 of the Explanatory Notes to the Immigration and Asylum Bill were determined; and what assumptions were made underlying those calculations. [97138]

Mrs. Roche: The question refers to a paragraph in the Explanatory Notes which were published on 9 February. A further set of Explanatory Notes were published on 18 June when the Immigration and Asylum Bill was introduced into the House of Lords.

A budget of £350 million for 1999–2000, £300 million for 2000–01, and £250 million for 2001–02 was provisionally allocated for asylum support costs in the Comprehensive Spending Review in July 1998. These figures were determined from the Asylum Costs model which calculates support costs on the basis of a number of assumptions including the number of asylum applications. Details of this model including its assumptions were set out in the document "Asylum Seeker Support—estimates of public expenditure" which was published on 22 March.

State Visits

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were arrested in connection with activities related to each State Visit in the last three years. [97263]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Within the Metropolitan Police Area, no-one was arrested in connection with activities related to the State Visits by the President of Israel (February 1997), the President of Brazil (December 1997), the Emperor of Japan (May 1998), the President of Germany (December 1998), or the President of Hungary (June 1999), and 15 people were arrested in connection with activities related to last month's State Visit by the President of China. Of these, five were released by the arresting officer without any further proceedings. Information for other police force areas is not collected centrally.

HMP Liverpool

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who was appointed to investigate recent allegations of bullying in relation to nursing staff at HMP Liverpool and on whose authority; who set the terms of reference for the inquiry; what guidance was given on the conduct of the inquiry and the compilation of the report; and to whom he intends the report will be made available in its entirety. [97281]

Mr. Boateng: The area manager for Merseyside and Manchester appointed Mr. R. S. McColm, then deputy governor grade at Manchester prison and now deputy governor at Wymott prison, and a trained senior investigating officer, to conduct the investigation. The area manager did so on his own authority, but he had discussed the matter with the operational director and the

then Director General. The area manager set the terms of reference for the inquiry. The terms of reference directed Mr. McColm to conduct the investigation in accordance with Prison Service Instruction to governors 37/1994, a copy of which is available in the Library, and to take account of the Prison Service guidance on "Combating harassment and discrimination".

On the question of disclosure, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I have her on 27 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *878*. However, my hon. Friend has also asked to meet me to discuss the matter and I shall arrange to do so shortly.

Law and Order

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to begin the national implementation of the framework for final warning schemes, reparation orders, action plan order, child safety orders, parenting orders, and youth offending teams; and if he will make a statement on the piloting of these schemes. [97307]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Pilots of the final warning scheme, reparation order, action plan order, child safety order, parenting order and youth offending teams under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 began in 10 areas in September 1998 and will run for 18 months. Subject to the experience of the pilots, the Government expect to implement nationally the provisions in the 1998 Act for youth offending teams in April 2000 and for the final warning scheme and new court orders in 2000–01. The pilots are being evaluated by a team led by Sheffield University. The Government expect to receive an interim report on the progress of the pilots shortly and this will be published in due course.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the local authorities which have used *(a)* local child curfew schemes, *(b)* anti-social behaviour orders and *(c)* court-ordered secure demands. [97306]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Applying to establish a local child curfew scheme is optional for local authorities, to be considered in the light of the wider crime and disorder reduction strategy developed under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and of the outcome of local consultation. No applications have yet been received.

Information on the number of anti-social behaviour orders made is not held centrally, but we are aware of seven orders made since 1 April 1999. Two were applied for by Liverpool City Council, one by North Somerset District Council and one by the London Borough of Camden. In addition, two were applied for by Derbyshire Constabulary and one by West Mercia Police.

Remands direct to local authority secure accommodation are made by the courts without an application from a local authority. Information on the use of court-ordered secure remands since 1 June 1999 is being collected from local authorities. I will write to my right hon. Friend as soon as it has been assembled.

Racism and Xenophobia (Draft Directive)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the European Commission to publish a draft directive on racism and xenophobia. [97286]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This matter is due to be discussed by the College of Commissioners on 10 November. However, I understand that there is a full agenda and it is possible that this item may not be reached, in which case it will be deferred to their next meeting on 16 November.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of asylum seekers who are currently *(a)* supported by local authorities and *(b)* in receipt of social security benefits. [97584]

Mrs. Roche: The latest information estimates that in August 1999, local authorities in London were supporting approximately 52,000 asylum seekers, including dependants. Figures for asylum seekers not supported by London boroughs are not available at present.

The latest information from the Department of Social Security (DSS) shows the estimated number of asylum seekers/other urgent case payment cases currently in receipt of Income Support or Jobseeker's allowance as at May 1999, is 47,000 (excluding dependants).

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the state of millennium compliance in *(a)* the Passport Agency and *(b)* the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [97287]

Mrs. Roche: All business critical systems within the United Kingdom Passport Agency have been prepared for millennium compliance. No risks of material disruption to the infrastructure process as a result of millennium date change have been identified.

The three business critical systems within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate have been prepared for millennium compliance. Business continuity plans have been prepared and tested in event of failure of the systems or supporting infrastructure.

Police

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he had made, at the time of his announcement of 16,000 police recruits on 30 September, of the number of officers who would leave the service over the next three years. [97234]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 4 November 1999]:* It is not possible to make such a projection. This is because of the uncertainty surrounding the number of officers who take early retirement on medical grounds or who leave the service before normal retirement age for other reasons. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given

by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on 29 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *1023*.

Electoral Reform

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the submissions made to the Home Office Working Party on Electoral Procedures by the two main consumer credit reference agencies; and if he will make a statement. [97431]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No. But the hon. Member may wish to ask the agencies concerned if they would agree to his doing so.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates his Department has made of the effect the proposals by the Home Office Working Party on Electoral Procedures on commercial access to the electoral register would have on *(a)* costs to and employment in the direct marketing and mail order industry and *(b)* fund raising by charities; and if he will make a statement. [97432]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: An extract of estimates by some businesses and charities of the costs that would result to them from a complete withdrawal of commercial access to the electoral register was attached as Annexe M of the Working Party's report, published on 19 October. The Working Party took note of these estimates in concluding that, in the wider economic interests of the United Kingdom, it would be wrong wholly to withdraw electoral registration data from commercial use. In the light of the recommendations in the report, further submissions with revised and detailed costings are being prepared by businesses, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will take these into account when considering the way forward on this issue.

Tampere Agreement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the nature of the Tampere discussions pertaining to Corpus Juris. [96574]

Mr. Charles Clarke: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reported to the House in his statement on 19 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns 253–65, "Corpus Juris" was not a topic for discussion at the Tampere European Council, nor did the European Council endorse any of the specific proposals in "Corpus Juris" such as creating a European penal code or a European public prosecutor. There was a brief discussion on whether to examine one Corpus Juris proposal, the idea of creating a European Public Prosecutor, concerned only with protecting the financial interests of the Community, but this was not pursued. The conclusions of the European Council were aimed at achieving

> "better compatibility and more convergence between the legal systems of member states".

In particular, the European Council concluded that the principle of mutual recognition, put forward by the United Kingdom, should become

> "the cornerstone of judicial co-operation in both civil and criminal matters within the Union".

The European Council also agreed to create an intergovernmental unit, 'Eurojust', to work in liaison with Europol and the European Judicial Network to help to facilitate

> "the proper co-ordination of national prosecuting authorities', and support national criminal investigations in cases of serious organised crime".

Motoring Offences

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for which motoring offences curfew orders and vehicle forfeiture can be used; and how often these court disposals have been used for motoring offences in each of the last three years for which data are available. [96637]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Curfew orders under section 12 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 are available for any offence for which a community penalty is appropriate. This provision has been piloted from July 1995 in seven areas, and will be made available throughout England and Wales from 1 December. The available data on the use of these provisions relate to the period July 1995 to June 1997.

Motoring offences resulting in a curfew order under section 12 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991—July 1995 to June 1997

Offence	*July to December 1995*	*January to June 1996*	*July to December 1996*	*January to June 1997*	*Total (July 1995 to June 1997)*
Driving whilst disqualified	3	9	19	34	65
Driving with excess alcohol	—	2	7	8	17
Driving whilst unfit through drugs	—	—	—	1	1
Failure to provide a specimen	—	—	—	1	1
Taking a vehicle without consent (TWOC)	1	1	6	6	14
Aggravated TWOC	—	—	2	7	9
Allowing oneself to be carried in a TWOC vehicle	—	—	—	1	1
Aggravated allowing self to be carried in a TWOC vehicle	—	—	—	1	1
Vehicle interference	—	1	—	3	4
Dangerous driving	—	—	—	2	2
Traffic offences	—	—	1	—	1
All motoring offences	4	13	35	64	116

Note:
These figures do not include theft of, or from, a vehicle.

Curfew orders are also available under sections 35, 37 and 43 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 for fine defaulters, persistent petty offenders and children aged 10 to 15 years, respectively, in specified circumstances. These provisions are also currently being piloted. The pilots began in January 1998. Available information as to their use for motoring offences in the pilot areas is as follows:

Use of curfews for offenders with summary motoring offences as the most serious offences	*Number of orders* 1998	1999 *(January-June)*
Fine defaulters	35	22
Persistent petty offenders	32	37
Children 10–15	6	3

Note:
1999 figures are provisional.

The courts' powers of forfeiture under section 43 of the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 are available for certain motoring offences (broadly those which are punishable by imprisonment). Unfortunately, no separate statistics are kept for the use of vehicle forfeiture.

Departmental Assets

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the assets sold by his Department and their value, item by item, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99 and estimate the value of asset sales planned to be made in 1999–00 and 2000–01. [96018]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The following information is available:

£

Year	*Land and property*	*Plant and machinery*	*Vehicles*	*Total*
1991–92	18,920,000	3,305,000	389,000	22,614,000
1992–93	10,316,000	4,858,000	363,000	15,537,000
1993–94	8,540,000	—	1,027,000	9,567,000
1994–95	7,233,000	98,000	115,000	7,446,000
1995–96	4,614,000	189,000	400,000	5,203,000
1996–97	1,451,000	2,818,000	121,000	4,390,000
1997–98	8,285,000	150,000	—	8,435,000

I regret that it is not possible to give an item by item listing of these sales due to their large number and the disproportionate cost of compiling this information.

The unaudited figures for 1998–99 indicate that the value of asset sales is likely to amount to around £17 million. Our projections for future asset sales were published in our Departmental Investment Strategy, in March 1999; for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 sales are estimated at £6,228,000 per year.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97044]

Mr. Straw: The straight line method of depreciation, whereby the cost of the asset is spread evenly over its useful life, is used in the Home Office for most of its assets. In accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual and accepted accounting standards, the following are not depreciated: land (which does not have a finite life); fixed assets in the course of construction; inventory items; and property held for disposal.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pig Farming

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for the introduction of financial support for pig farming. [96704]

Ms Quin: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) on 4 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *330*.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed to the Departmental Expenditure Limit for his Department for 1999–2000. [97834]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be reduced by £42,504,000 from £1,267,812,000 to £1,225,308,000. The reduction is the net effect of an Intervention Board (IB) running cost End Year-Flexibility (EYF) take up of £2,310,000; a £150,000 transfer from DTI; a £264,000 net increase in receipts for the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science; and a transfer of £44,700,000 to the territorial departments for Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance (HLCA) payments.

Within the DEL there will be transfers from IB to MAFF of the following:

(i) an additional £22,000,000 for enforcement of Specified Risk Material (SRM) controls;

(ii) a reduction of £8,000,000 in SRM receipts by the Meat Hygiene Service;

(iii) an increase of £15,300,000 for HLCAs;

(iv) £1,000,000 for a business support measure; and

(v) a reduction of £9,000,000 in receipts from charging for cattle passports.

Departmental Asset Sales

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the assets sold by his Ministry and their values, broken down by item, for each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99; and if he will estimate the value of assets sales planned to be made in 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [96224]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The information is as follows:

Disposal of Fixed Assets

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 15 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *574–75*. The following additional information is available.

Property Assets

A list of all properties sold since 1991, together with the income received, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Non Property Assets

The Ministry owns a high volume of relatively low value fixed assets, where fixed assets are defined as items costing in excess of £2,000 with a useful life in excess of one year.

A continuing programme of investment means items such as vehicles and IT equipment are renewed every 4 to 6 years. As a result, a number of life expired assets will be sold each year as new assets are purchased to replace them. Extracting information on these sales could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, information for the 1998–99 financial year is given in the following table:

Group	*Number items retired*	*Cash received £*
IT equipment	58	0
Vehicles	67	195,731
Office equipment	24	528

IT equipment and office equipment, by its nature, will have minimal value at the end of its life. Vehicles in the Private Use Car scheme are replaced every 4 years and are sold by auction.

Estimated Sales for 1999–2000 and 2000–01

Planned property sales over the next two years include the continued disposal of buffer depots and stores, together with the sale of redundant office space. A total of £20 million is expected in 1999–2000, of which £12 million has already been received. Sales revenue of £12 million is planned for 2000–01. These figures exclude the proposed sale of New Covent Garden as it is not yet possible to determine what the proceeds from this sale might be.

Non-property assets are expected to continue to turn over at a similar rate to the figures presented for 1998–99.

Sheep Imports

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many sheep were imported *(a)* live and *(b)* in carcase form into the United Kingdom from continental Europe and Ireland, broken down by country of origin, in each of the last five years and in 1999 to date. [95814]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The number of live sheep imported into Great Britain from other member states since 1994 is given in the following table. These figures are derived from the information messages which European law requires exporting countries to send to the importing country to inform them of the number of animals certified for export in a given consignment.

Figures are not available for Northern Ireland at this time.

Country	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*[1]
Belgium	535	206	165	272	230	486
Germany	0	22	4	0	8	0
Denmark	0	0	0	0	3	0
Spain	1,750	0	0	0	51	0
France	29	46	370	12	61	6
Republic of Ireland	2,055	46	1,956	983	6,117	624
Netherlands	122	544	79	519	234	272
Portugal	0	0	0	524	0	0
Total	4,491	864	2,574	2,310	6,704	1,388

Note:
These figures are provisional and subject to validation.

The product weight (in tonnes) of sheep in carcase form imported into the United Kingdom from other member states as recorded on the Official Overseas Trade Statistics is given in the following table. The number of sheep that this represents is not known.

Country	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*[1]
Belgium	1,467	1,821	736	443	482	5
Germany	133	195	2,554	1,672	817	214
Denmark	22	31	653	50	11	135
Spain	466	343	1,946	2,482	1,920	816
France	920	1,330	1,854	1,209	1,208	945
Republic of Ireland	2,672	2,918	3,784	3,313	1,775	1,061
Netherlands	3,856	4,487	5,613	6,418	5,097	2,647
Italy	0	0	202	68	150	1
Austria	0	0	17	16	0	0
Greece	29	0	0	0	0	0
Sweden	0	0	28	0	0	0
Finland	0	0	0	13	0	0
Total	9,565	11,125	17,387	15,684	11,460	5,824

[1] To October 1999

Note:
Please note that these data are subject to a degree of statistical error; care is needed when interpreting this data.

Animal Feedstuffs

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received about the French response to the European Commission report exposing instances of the use of sewage sludge in feed for French livestock; and if he will publish them. [97229]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 4 November 1999]:* No written reports have been directly received on the French response. However, at the September Agricultural Council, the French Agriculture Minister provided verbal assurances that the shortcomings identified in the Commission's inspection report had been firmly addressed. There has been no suggestion of widespread use in animal feed of human sewage. The Commission's report focused on the recovery of animal material from waste water treatment systems in rendering plants.

Food Imports

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he can take to prevent the import of food and food products known or believed to have been produced using illegal methods. [97230]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 4 November 1999]:* Detailed rules are in place under European Community law and in national legislation in member states making it

an offence to export food and food products which might compromise the health and life of humans, animals or plants. Similar controls apply to imports into the Community from third countries under EC and domestic legislation. Under World Trade Organisation rules, imports from countries outside the EU can be restricted in order to protect human, animal or plant life and health, provided such measures are based on sound science.

Member states may take unilateral safeguard measures to restrict specific imports on an ad hoc basis where they believe health risks exist which are not adequately provided for under EC legislation. Such supplementary measures, details of which must be notified to the European Commission for their agreement, must be proportionate to and consistent with any harmonised Community rules in the area concerned.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 8 November 1999

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Employee Consultation

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current status of the draft Council Directive establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees; and if a blocking minority currently shares the Government's position. [97565]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The draft directive establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees has not been discussed in the Council of Ministers since it was first proposed by the Commission in December 1998.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to extend the Working Time Directive to the transport industry. [97355]

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to propose amendments to the Working Time Regulations to specify working hours for the occupations of mobile workers, including roundsmen. [97252]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Proposals to extend the working time directive to workers (mobile and non-mobile) in the transport sector are currently being negotiated in Brussels. It is not expected that the Directive will be formally adopted before next year. After that, there will be consultation on implementation in the United Kingdom.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the number of the people who have benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage. [97579]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that 700,000 more people were earning above national minimum wage rates in March-May 1999 than in the same period last year and almost two million who were earning below the national minimum wage will benefit when its full effects can be measured.

Defence and Security Goods (Exports)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the defence and security goods that are currently prohibited from *(a)* use by UK security services, *(b)* sale within the UK and *(c)* sale abroad under export licence. [97481]

Dr. Howells: I understand that specified weapons are prohibited from manufacture, sale, hire or importation by the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988. Section 141 of the 1988 Act includes an exemption for the supply of such items to the Crown and visiting forces, but not the police service. I also understand that, under the Firearms Act 1968, weapons whose possession is prohibited without the express authority of the Secretary of State include fully automatic weapons, self-loading and pump action rifles, handguns, mortars, rocket launchers, weapons designed to discharge noxious substances and firearms disguised as something else. Ammunition regarded as particularly dangerous (such as that designed to explode or expand on impact, pierce armour or have an incendiary effect at the target) is also subject to prohibition.

The export of certain defence and security goods has been banned, and details are set out in the Summary of additional UK Restrictions on the Export of Strategic Goods, compiled by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; a copy of this document is in the Library of the House.

Packaging Waste

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he proposes to ensure that *(a)* retailers and *(b)* packer and fillers take an increased share of the recovery and recycling obligation contained in the UK Packaging Waste Regulations 1997. [97472]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Advisory Committee on Packaging has proposed that the percentage obligation of packaging manufacturers should be reduced by two percentage points and that of packer/fillers and retailers be increased by one percentage point each. I expect to make a further announcement on this matter shortly.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the increased cost to United Kingdom packaging manufacturers following implementation of the UK Packaging Waste Regulations in 1997. [97471]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The recovery and recycling obligations under the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 took effect in 1998. My Department estimates that the costs of complying with these obligations in 1998 was some £78,000,000 for the 4,011 obligated parties registered with the Environment Agency or Scottish Environment Protection Agency. We do not have a breakdown of figures specifically for packaging manufacturers, but these made up some 8 per cent. of the 4,011 registrations in 1998.

Energy Efficiency

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to provide direct support to manufacturing industry to improve energy efficiency; and if he will make a statement. [97632]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1989, the Government have been providing impartial advice to business and commerce through the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme. This provides information, energy efficiency studies and research and development support to manufacturers and others in the non-domestic sector. The Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme has helped industry to save over £650 million per annum, to reduce emissions by over 3 million tonnes of carbon per annum and to improve energy efficiency.

In his Budget statement on 9 March 1999, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that, as a part of the Government's proposal to introduce the Climate Change Levy, he intended to recycle the revenue from the levy, in full, to business. He indicated that the Government intended that some £50 million of revenue from the levy would be used to assist with funding of schemes to promote energy efficiency, including additional support for renewable sources of energy. The Government are considering how best to make use of the proposed additional funding to maximise the benefit to the non-domestic sector.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the extent to which the industrial sectors already with high energy efficiency will assist in achieving Kyoto targets; and if he will make a statement. [97641]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Department commissions research which estimates the potential for cost-effective energy efficiency improvements in industry, commerce, the public sector and housing. This is done at a disaggregated level so that the scope in individual industrial sub-sectors is known. The information is being used in discussions with energy intensive sectors as a starting point for energy efficiency targets for negotiated agreements on the Climate Change Levy.

Integrated Tariff

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many types of duty there are on imported goods and services under the Integrated Tariff of the United Kingdom. [96202]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The Integrated Tariff of the United Kingdom (The Tariff) provides for ten types of duty or other charges on imported goods.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Expenditure

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes will be made to his Department's departmental expenditure limit/running cost limit for 1999–2000. [98013]

Mr. Rooker: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XII Vote 2 and Class XII Vote 3, the Department of Social Security Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000 will be reduced by £111,836,000 from £3,377,638,000 to £3,265,802,000. This is the net effect of increased Voted provision of £130,974,000 and reduced non-Voted provision of £242,810,000.

The increase on Class XII Vote 3 is the net effect of additional Comprehensive Spending Review funding of £37,000,000 (running costs), a take up of £8,000,000 (running costs) from the Departmental Unallocated Provision (which will not change the gross running costs limit), an increase of £3,137,000 (running costs) in respect of the reform of all work test and active case management, an increase of £120,407,000 (running costs) under the end year flexibility scheme as announced by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*, and an increase of £8,520,000 and £9,769,000 under the capital and other discretionary end year flexibility schemes respectively.

Other changes result from a reduction of £6,631,000 (running costs) arising from a number of small transfers offset by a corresponding increase on Class I Vote 3 (Employment Services), a reduction of £24,351,000 (running costs) arising from the continuing effects of the transfer of responsibility for Contributions Agency and Working Family Tax Credit to Inland Revenue, offset by a corresponding increase on Class XVI Vote 4, Inland Revenue: administration, a reduction of £1,670,000 (running costs) arising from the transfer of responsibility for the Womens Unit to the Cabinet Office, offset by a corresponding increase in Class XVII, Vote 1, a net reduction of £261,000 (running costs) and £998,000 (capital) arising from the continuing implications to DSS of the Scotland Bill, offset by a corresponding increase in the Scottish Executive and a reduction of £486,000 (running costs) towards increased Administration costs of Motability, offset by a corresponding increase on Class XII Vote 2. There is also an increase of £11,972,000 (running costs) associated with services provided to other Government Departments on a repayment basis, an increase of £160,000 to meet the costs of overseas medical examinations of War Pensioners, an increase of £37,997,000 (running costs) arising from increased payments of Value Added Tax on contracted out services. Also an increase of £13,814,000 resulting from the virement from capital expenditure to running costs. Appropriations in aid increase by £86,427,000.

Changes in the Welfare to Work provision arise from an increase of £755,000 in the administrative costs of measures to help people with a disability or long term illness move into or remain in work, an increase of £3,378,000 under the end year flexibility scheme as announced by the then the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*, an increase of £18,000 in costs associated with the unemployed project team offset by a corresponding reduction on Class I, Vote 1 Education and Employment, a reduction of £55,000 for costs associated with innovative schemes relating to the programme of measures to help people with a disability or long term illness move into or remain in work, offset by a corresponding increase on Class I Vote 3 Employment Service and a reduction of £80,000 in the Child Care disregard provision.

As a result of these changes the running cost limit of this Department will be increased by £141,119,000 from £2,868,735,000 to £3,009,854,000 and the running cost limit of the Welfare to Work programme will be increased by £4,016,000 from £6,952,000 to £10,968,000.

Changes to Class XII Vote 2 arise from the transfer of £486,000 for increased administrative costs of Motability offset by a corresponding reduction on Class XII, Vote 3 and an increase of £14,350,000 under the end year flexibility scheme as announced by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *393*.

The net change in non-Voted provision of £242,810,000 arises from a reduction in payments from the National Insurance Fund to other Government Departments and Department of Social Security following the transfer of responsibility for the Contributions Agency to Inland Revenue (£281,027,000) and also a switch from non-Voted to Voted from the Departmental Unallocated Provision (£8,000,000) offset by an increase in National Insurance Fund payments to Department of Social Security (£46,217,000).

Increases will be offset by transfers or a charge on the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Child Maintenance

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate *(a)* the total number of absent parents who are liable for child maintenance payments and *(b)* of this total the numbers who have an assessment made by the Child Support Agency, for the latest available date. [97143]

Angela Eagle: Information is not available on which to estimate the number of non-resident parents who may be liable for child maintenance as part of a private arrangement.

However, as at May 1999, 942,300 non-resident parents had an assessment made by the Child Support Agency.

Source:

CSA Quarterly Summary of Statistics.

Social Security Agreement (Australia)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what notice Australia gave of its decision to terminate the social security agreement between Australia and the UK; and what the ramifications will be for British pensioners covered by the existing agreement. [97399]

Mr. Rooker: The Australian Government announced in July that they intended to terminate the Social Security agreement with the UK. We have not received formal notice of termination. The agreement would terminate 12 months after the UK received formal notification.

The agreement helps UK pensioners who have lived in Australia for less than 10 years to meet the residence test for Australia's Age Pension. It can also help former residents of Australia now living in the UK to qualify for UK State Pension. People who had already become entitled to benefit through the agreement when it terminated would remain covered by its terms, so there would be no effect on them.

Pensions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what inflation assumption and what financial provision was made in the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2000–01 for the uprating of the basic state pension. [97480]

Mr. Darling: Financial provision for the costs of uprating is set by reference to the most recent inflation assumption. Inflation assumptions for 2000–01 underpinning forecasts for expenditure for the Comprehensive Spending Review are set out at page 108 table B1 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1998 (HC620). These forecasts were updated in November 1998 and for the Budget in March 1999. The inflation assumptions underlying the Department's latest expenditure forecasts are set out on page 89 of the Social Security Departmental Report (Cm 4214).

Disability Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide, for (i) invalidity benefit and (ii) incapacity benefit for each of the last 15 financial years, *(a)* the average number of recipients, *(b)* the average number of successful new claims, *(c)* the average total expenditure in current prices and *(d)* the average weekly amount received in current prices; and if he will provide separate estimates for those under state pension age. [96300]

Mr. Bayley *[holding answer 29 October 1999]*: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Table 1 gives figures for recipients and average payments for Invalidity Benefit and for short-term (higher) and long-term Incapacity Benefit (IB) which like Invalidity Benefit (IVB) apply from the twenty ninth week of incapacity. The table excludes short-term (lower) IB which is the equivalent of the old Sickness Benefit for the first twenty eight weeks.

Table 1: Numbers of IVB/IB short-term higher and long-term rate recipients, and average weekly amounts in payment at April 1998 prices

	Recipients all ages	Average weekly amount (£)	Recipients under pension age	Average weekly amount (£)
31 March 1984	797,000	88.70	729,800	88.75
30 March 1985	848,948	88.95	764,648	89.20
5 April 1986	899,200	90.35	798,200	90.75
4 April 1987	967,900	88.75	841,600	89.05
2 April 1988	1,047,500	87.15	897,400	87.65
1 April 1989	1,126,000	85.90	951,600	86.65
31 March 1990	1,208,900	91.65	1,003,200	86.10

Table 1: Numbers of IVB/IB short-term higher and long-term rate recipients, and average weekly amounts in payment at April 1998 prices

	Recipients all ages	Average weekly amount (£)	Recipients under pension age	Average weekly amount (£)
30 March 1991	1,306,000	92.15	1,068,100	84.35
4 April 1992	1,438,900	89.30	1,174,800	90.90
3 April 1993	1,580,000	90.70	1,298,500	92.45
2 April 1994	1,681,200	92.75	1,383,900	94.75
12 April 1995	1,766,900	93.20	1,467,600	95.10
29 February 1996	1,692,400	91.85	1,447,320	92.85
28 February 1997	1,632,060	88.45	1,444,860	88.80
28 February 1998	1,561,740	85.95	1,440,120	86.00

However, it should be noted that the great majority of IB recipients are on the long term rate of benefit. Table 2 shows the average amount payable to these recipients as this is the most accurate reflection of benefit levels for long term sick and disabled people on IB, and the most appropriate comparison with Invalidity Benefit rates.

Table 2: Numbers of IB long term recipients, and average weekly amounts in payment at April 1998 prices

	Recipients all ages	Average weekly amount (£)	Recipients under pension age	Average weekly amount (£)
29 February 1996	1,593,300	93.80	1,348,260	95.20
28 February 1997	1,526,780	90.40	1,339,620	91.00
28 February 1998	1,458,740	87.75	1,337,120	87.95

Notes:
1. From 1984 to 1995, figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claimants. From 1996, figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 pence.
3. Since April 1995 IB has not been paid to people who are over State Pension age. However, people who transferred to IB from IVB were permitted to continue to receive it beyond State Pension age.

Table 3 gives the required information for new claims. People do not make a fresh claim when moving from short-term (lower) to short-term (higher) IB.

Table 3: Commencements of IVB/IB short-term higher rate and long-term rate including progression from sickness benefit or IB short-term lower rate

	All ages	Under pension age
4 April 1998 to 31 March 1984	277,700	272,900
2 April 1994 to 30 March 1985	272,000	264,101
1 April 1985 to 5 April 1986	284,500	276,300
7 April 1986 to 4 April 1987	284,400	277,700
6 April 1987 to 2 April 1988	281,800	275,500
4 April 1998 to 1 April 1989	280,000	273,100
3 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	283,700	275,800
2 April 1990 to 30 March 1991	287,700	278,000
1 April 1991 to 4 April 1992	323,300	313,400
6 April 1992 to 3 April 1993	337,100	329,700

Table 3: Commencements of IVB/IB short-term higher rate and long-term rate including progression from sickness benefit or IB short-term lower rate

	All ages	Under pension age
5 April 1993 to 2 April 1994	348,500	340,300
4 April 1994 to 12 April 1995	340,800	333,900
13 April 1995 to 31 March 1996	271,200	266,900
1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997	283,500	280,100
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	285,600	281,800

Note:
Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claimants.

Table 4 gives estimate expenditure figures. It is not possible to provide figures for short-term (higher) and long-term rates of IB only. The figures are therefore for the whole of IB including short-term (lower) rate. For consistency, expenditure on Sickness Benefit (the equivalent of short-term (lower) rate IB) has been included for the years up to 1994–95.

Table 4: Estimated expenditure on invalidity benefit/sickness benefit, and on incapacity benefit (all rates)
£ billion 1998–99 prices

	Over pension age	Under pension age	Total
1983–84	0.3	3.8	4.1
1984–85	0.3	4.0	4.4
1985–86	0.4	4.1	4.5
1986–87	0.5	4.2	4.7
1987–88	0.6	4.4	5.0
1988–89	0.7	4.6	5.2
1989–90	0.8	4.8	5.6
1990–91	0.9	5.0	5.9
1991–92	1.1	5.8	6.9
1992–93	1.2	6.4	7.7
1993–94	1.3	7.1	8.4
1994–95	1.4	7.6	9.0

Table 4: Estimated expenditure on invalidity benefit/sickness benefit, and on incapacity benefit (all rates)

£ billion 1998–99 prices

	Over pension age	Under pension age	Total
1995–96	1.2	7.4	8.6
1996–97	0.9	7.2	8.1
1997–98	0.7	6.9	7.6

Note:
Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have claimed the higher rate of disability living allowance *(a)* this year and *(b)* in each of the last three years. [97267]

Mr. Bayley: Disability Living Allowance has a care component with three rates and a mobility component with two. People may be awarded either component or both, depending on their care and mobility needs.

Number of people receiving the highest rates of DLA at 31 May each year.

DLA recipients	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Highest rate of care component (alone or with lower rate of mobility component)	85,300	98,500	107,000	109,200
Higher rate of mobility Component (alone or with middle or lowest rate of care component)	974,800	1,032,400	1,061,500	1,069,600
Highest rate of care component and higher rate of mobility component	235,900	260,900	274,900	282,700

Source:
Analytical Services Division; 5 per cent. data.

Personal Service Companies

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals trading as personal service companies are currently under contract to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Information Technology Services Agency and *(c)* the Benefits Agency. [97294]

Angela Eagle: The Department uses the services of professional contractors chiefly in the areas of accountancy and IT services. We have no information on the numbers of accountancy contractors who may have established personal service companies.

A Framework Agreement for the provision of Computer and Related Services to the Department has been in place since June 1996. Within this Framework are 7 companies that are contracted to provide the Department with IT Contractor staff. The Department's contractual arrangements are with the Framework suppliers and not the individual IT Contractors.

New Deal (Costs)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the administrative staff costs, *(b)* the costs of employer subsidies and *(c)* the amount spent on training recruits under the New Deal scheme during the last year. [96266]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

In 1998–99, total expenditure for the New Deal for Young People (18–24 year olds) for administrative staff costs was £95m. This includes the cost of New Deal Personal Advisers who are at the core of the successful delivery of New Deal.

The spend on employer subsides was £18.6m.

Within New Deal for Young People, participants benefit from a wide variety of advice, guidance, training, work experience and other specialist provision. The amount spent on New Deal provision was £82.4m. (This figure excludes administration costs, employer subsidies, options allowance payments, marketing and initial set-up costs). A significant further volume of provision will be paid for in this financial year. The national launch of New Deal took place in April 1998 and as a result young people did not move into Options provision until later in the year and secondly that there was some late billing by providers. Expenditure on training provision is also affected by the higher than expected, and welcome, movement from the Gateway into unsubsidised jobs.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

McKenzie Friends

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to put McKenzie friends on a statutory footing; and if he will make a statement. [97250]

Mr. Lock: The Government have no plans at present to place the role of McKenzie friends on a statutory footing. Judges have developed common law rules so that litigants in person are permitted a McKenzie friend in proceedings in open court, and in chambers, unless the court is satisfied that fairness and justice does not require that assistance or where the court has grounds for believing that a McKenzie friend has acted inappropriately.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Housing Benefit

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the

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communications addressed to local authorities from his Department on the administration of housing benefit since 1 January. [96529]

Ms Armstrong: The administration of housing benefit is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Social Security. However, the Department did write to the Chief Executives of local authorities in England on 30 July concerning the implementation work on the 'Supporting People' initiative which will impact on the implementation of the Transitional Housing Benefit scheme in April 2000.

Walton Group Plc

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much public sector funding the Walton Group Plc received in the last 10 years for re-generating properties in Liverpool; when this funding was approved; for what purpose the moneys were made available; when the expenditure was audited by the relevant authorities; and if he will make a statement. [96469]

Ms Armstrong: The Walton Commercial Group Ltd. (now Walton Group plc) was awarded a grant of £4.5 million in July 1992 towards the refurbishment of the Exchange Flags Building in Liverpool City Centre to provide 400,000 sq. ft. of refurbished office space and a museum. Total grant payments of £4,444,782 were made over the period November 1992 to May 1994 against claimed qualifying expenditure of £23,705,511.

The Urban Regeneration Agency (English Partnerships), acting as agents for the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions, are currently reviewing the project and the use to which the grant has been put.

Motoring Offences

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what studies into the incidence of repeat offending by motorists and ways to reduce such repeat offending his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* received the results of in the last five years. [96640]

Mr. Hill: Research is currently in progress to study the effect of the Road Traffic Act 1991 on prosecutions for dangerous driving. Among other topics, this includes a comparison of sentencing trends before and since the 1991 Act and monitoring of the behaviour of persons convicted of serious driving offences. The aim is to improve understanding so as to deter poor driving more effectively. The project began in May 1998 and is due to be completed in October 2000.

A project has recently been completed for the Department to monitor the effectiveness of the experimental drink-drive rehabilitation scheme. The research carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory and published as "Drink/driver rehabilitation courses in England and Wales" (TRL report 426) suggests that offenders who have attended an approved rehabilitation course are three times less likely to re-offend. The scheme is to be made permanent throughout Great Britain from 1 January 2000. Consideration is currently being given to further research and monitoring.

A research project has also recently been published on "The High Risk Offenders Scheme for drink-drivers" (TRL report 394). This covers, among other categories, drivers who have been convicted more than once of driving over the limit within a 10 year period. The research has shown that reoffenders have different characteristics to the other High Risk categories.

Tree Planting

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the contribution that the planting of trees could make to meeting the United Kingdom's Kyoto targets on the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. [97034]

Mr. Mullin: New planting of trees has taken place at a rate of 15,000 to 20,000 hectares per year since 1990 as a result of Government policy on woodland expansion. The present rate of increase in tree cover is likely to contribute about 0.25 per cent. towards the commitment under the Kyoto protocol.

It would be possible to increase this proportion by accelerating the rate of new planting. Policies and initiative schemes whereby this might be achieved are under consideration by the Government Departments responsible. The first priority, however, must be to reduce emission levels as the most effective and secure way of delivering the UK's targets.

The Government aim to publish their Draft Climate Change Programme around the turn of the year. It will set out how the Government plan to meet their Kyoto target and move towards their domestic goal of reducing CO2 emissions by 20 per cent.

Housing

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many housing starts and completions by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* social housing providers there were in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–1999. [96932]

Mr. Mullin: Figures are given in the table for the estimated number of new dwellings started and completed in England by local authorities and registered social landlords, in the latest three financial years:

Housebuilding

Financial year	*Local authority*	*Registered social landlords*
Starts		
1996–97	395	22,916
1997–98	259	19,629
1998–99	149	17,602
Completions		
1996–97	451	24,535
1997–98	323	21,397
1998–99	194	18,920

Motorways and Trunk Roads

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion

of *(a)* motorways and *(b)* trunk roads are expected to have a residual life of (i) less than zero and (ii) zero to four years at the end of the current financial year. [97067]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Peter Nutt, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 8 November 1999:

You recently wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions concerning the expected residual life of motorways and trunk roads.

The Highways Agency has a target to ensure that the percentage of the trunk road network having zero residual life at the end of financial year 1999/2000 is less than the figure published in the 1998 report of the National Road Maintenance Condition Survey (NRMCS). This gives the proportion of Motorways and All-purpose trunk roads as 4.6 percent and 8.2 percent respectively. The Agency expects to achieve this target with the proportions being lower than the 1998 figures at the end of the current financial year.

There is no specific target for the residual life band zero to four years in the Agency's Business Plan but the information will be published in the 1999 edition of the NRMCS report. The Agency expects that the proportions will not be significantly different to those quoted in the 1998 report. These state that 8.2 percent of Motorways and 7.2 percent of All-purpose trunk roads had a residual life of zero to four years.

It is important to emphasise that residual life is only one of several indicators of road condition. A zero residual life indicates the onset of a less predictable deterioration pattern and the need for investigation. It does not necessarily indicate that the road is about to fail. I trust that this information is helpful.

Rail Services

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received *(a)* on train cancellations and delays that are due to leaves on the track, *(b)* on the arrangements made by Railtrack and train operating companies to clear leaves from the track, *(c)* on the level of resources spent each year since privatisation on such activities and *(d)* on train cancellations and delays on Connex North Kent lines due to leaves on the track. [97225]

Mr. Hill: The Secretary of State and the Franchising Director have received few representations about train cancellations and delays relating to leaves on the track or the level of resources devoted to leaf clearance. None of these has concerned the Connex North Kent lines specifically. Railtrack and train operating companies have set aside £50 million to combat leaves on the lines.

Train Drivers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the circumstances surrounding the suspension and subsequently continued employment of train drivers who are caught driving without due care or attention. [97776]

Mr. Hill: In the first instance, it is for the employer to decide on appropriate disciplinary action to be taken with staff who contravene proper working practices. In addition there are duties on employees and employers under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and under specific regulations to ensure that work is done safely. For instance, the Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994 require that employees are fit and competent to undertake activities (such as train driving) which are safety critical. The Health and Safety Executive could prosecute employers or employees who have contravened these duties and requirements.

Among the immediate measures agreed at the meeting that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister held with rail industry leaders on 25 October were a review of consistent standards of driver training and establishing a consistent approach to safety management, embracing best practice across the network.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by what means the Government will define energy-intensive operations when deciding which firms will receive significant discounts on the climate change levy. [97378]

Mr. Meacher: For the purpose of the climate change levy, energy intensive operations have been defined as those listed in Annex I to the European Union's Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive. Sites which undertake operations of this type may join an appropriate sectoral energy efficiency agreement. Sectors which are able to negotiate satisfactory agreements will be eligible for reduced rates of levy.

We have received suggestions from industry for alternative definitions and are giving these consideration as part of overall consideration of industry representations on the design of the levy.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions with which less energy-intensive sectors the Government have started preliminary discussions on energy efficiency agreements; and to what extent those discussions have included the possibility of linking in with such agreements a mechanism for varying rates of climate change levy. [97380]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are not discussing energy efficiency agreements with less energy-intensive sectors. The Government invited the ten largest energy intensive industry sectors to participate in negotiations for energy efficiency agreements in March this year. Subsequently, we have initiated negotiations for agreements with a number of smaller energy intensive sectors.

In both cases, the Government are offering the prospect of significantly lower rates of levy for those sectors that can agree targets for improving their energy efficiency which meet the Government's criteria.

We have received representations from some non-intensive sectors. For non-intensive sectors, it may be worthwhile for them to explore the possibility of voluntary energy efficiency agreements under the Government's energy efficiency best practice programme. Though voluntary agreements would not entitle participants to discounts from the levy, they would facilitate the sharing of best practice, benchmarking, and other information between companies. They would also help them cut out waste, save money and reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Lackenby to Shipton Pylon Line

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost of road improvement works in connection with the line of pylons from Lackenby to Shipton; and if he will make a statement. [97375]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I understand that the National Grid Company, in consultation with appropriate parties, is making various road improvements in the process of constructing the North Yorkshire electricity line. The cost of these roads improvements is being met by the company and the details are a matter for it.

Leasehold Reform

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation on leasehold reform. [97434]

Mr. Mullin: We have almost completed our analysis of the responses received to our consultation paper on residential leasehold reform, and will announce our conclusions shortly.

Rural Rail Services

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to set targets for *(a)* investment in railways serving rural areas and *(b)* improvement in rail services in rural areas. [97433]

Mr. Hill: There are no plans to set targets for this investment. I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 1 November 1999, *Official Report,* column *10,* concerning funding of improvements in rail services in rural areas.

Regional Planning Guidance

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his timetable for dealing with the report of the panel on Regional Planning Guidance for the south-east of England; and what opportunities there will be for the public to have their views on the panel report taken into account. [97288]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* There will be an opportunity for the public to make their views known when the Government's proposed changes to the draft Regional Planning Guidance are published for consultation. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning indicated in the Opposition Day debate on Planning on 2 November 1999, *Official Report,* column 1221, we hope this will happen early in the new year.

Auditing Procedures

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what investigations are currently under way into the auditing procedures for town and parish councils; [97284]

(2) what recent discussions have been held between officials of his Department and representatives of the National Association of Local Councils the auditing procedures faced by town and parish councils. [97285]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* Audit procedures are a matter for the independent Audit Commission. Their officials have been discussing with the National Association of Local Councils a pilot exercise to investigate whether the cost of audits of town and parish councils can be reduced whilst maintaining the necessary level of assurance.

Government Office for the North West

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money has been spent on publications by the Government Office for the North West since its establishment. [97608]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I will write to the hon. Member with the information and place a copy in the Library.

Environment Protection Act 1990

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to bring into force the contaminated land regime in Part IIA of the Environment Protection Act 1990. [97755]

Mr. Mullin: Subject to the outcome of the current consultation, and necessary Parliamentary procedures, we expect to bring the regime into force on 1 April 2000.

Mopeds

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the removal of full moped licence entitlement from new car licences; and if he will make a statement. [97672]

Mr. Hill: In July, we consulted on a proposal to issue successful car driving test candidates with a provisional, rather than a full moped licence, as part of a package of measures to improve rider safety. This would mean that newly qualified drivers wanting to ride a moped would be required to take a basic training course like other persons who wish to ride powered two-wheelers. These drivers are generally young, and they have high accident rates. Our reason for proposing this change is that the skills for riding safely a powered two-wheeler are different from those for driving a car and that these riders would be safer on the road after basic training. The proposed change would not affect anyone who already held a full moped licence. We are currently considering the responses that we have received and, when we have taken decisions, they will be announced.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* moped riders and *(b)* cyclists were (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured in the years 1993 to 1998; what were the annual rates per 100,000 in each case; and if he will make a statement. [97673]

Mr. Hill: The number of killed and seriously injured pedal cyclists and moped riders in Great Britain and rates of casualty per 100,000 population are given in the table.

	Pedal cyclists		*Moped riders*	
	Killed	*Seriously injured*	*Killed*	*Seriously injured*
Casualties				
1993	186	3,611	22	660
1994	172	3,629	17	545
1995	213	3,754	19	541
1996	203	3,586	11	431
1997	183	3,409	17	402
1998	158	3,154	10	393
Casualty rate per 100,000 population				
1993	0.33	6.38	0.04	1.17
1994	0.30	6.75	0.03	0.96
1995	0.37	6.59	0.03	0.95
1996	0.36	6.28	0.02	0.75
1997	0.32	5.95	0.03	0.70
1998	0.27	5.48	0.02	0.68

Road Fatalities

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of road fatalities that are caused by *(a)* excessive speed, *(b)* failure to observe traffic regulations, *(c)* failure to observe traffic signs and *(d)* failure to observe maximum speed limits in the most recent year for which figures are available. [97777]

Mr. Hill: Research suggests that vehicle speeds in excess of the speed limit, or which are inappropriate for prevailing conditions, are a major contributory factor in around one third of collisions on our roads. No estimate has been made of the total number caused by failure to observe traffic signs, or other traffic regulations.

London-Tilbury-Southend Line

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information his Department holds and what discussions have taken place with *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* train operators in relation to (i) the funding of signalling on the LTS line and (ii) the punctuality and safety implications of the introduction of a new station at West Ham on this line; and if he will make a statement. [97406]

Mr. Hill: The Secretary of State has not held discussions with either Railtrack or train operators about the funding of signalling on the LTS line or the punctuality and safety implications of the new station at West Ham. The Rail Regulator has discussed a new signalling system for the LTS line with Railtrack. The Franchising Director is aware that the new station at Wet Ham has resulted in some loss of punctuality on the line. He is monitoring the situation and will be meeting the train operator within the next two weeks to discuss this matter. I am not aware of any safety implications associated with the opening of this station.

Bursting Stone Quarry

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had on the application to extend Bursting Stone Quarry in Cumbria. [97670]

Mr. Raynsford: The Lake District National Park Authority resolved to grant planning permission for a proposed extension to Bursting Stone Quarry but referred the matter to Secretary of State because, in its view, the proposal constituted a departure from the development plan. After carefully considering all the documents and representations before him, the Secretary of State informed the Authority on 7 May that he had decided to call in the application for his own decision as, in his view, it raises planning issues of wider than local importance which he considers he ought to decide himself. The Secretary of State's legal duty of impartiality prevents him for having any discussions with any party concerning it.

I understand that the applicants have been discussing with the Authority the scope for agreeing a modern scheme of planning conditions for the quarry under the minerals review provisions of the Environment Act 1995 and based upon its existing planning permissions. Further action on the called in planning application is being held in abeyance pending the outcome of those discussions.

Biosafety Protocol

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from non-Governmental organisations concerned with development issues regarding the UK Government's position on the Biosafety Protocol; and if he will make a statement. [97658]

Mr. Meacher: My Department has received no representations to date. Development issues would be a matter for the Department for International Development.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will report on the progress of the Docklands Light Railway. [97901]

Mr. Hill: I have placed in the Library of the House the Docklands Light Railway Ltd.'s Annual Report and accounts for 1998–99.

The Railway continues to make excellent progress. The extension under the River Thames to Lewisham is set to open in November, in time for the Millennium and some two months ahead of schedule. Passenger numbers increased from 23 million to 30 million during the year. DLR Ltd. is currently owned by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and will transfer to Transport for London on 3 July 2000.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the methods of depreciation

his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [96921]

Mr. Ingram: Straight line depreciation is the principal method which NI Departments and the Northern Ireland Office intend to apply to fixed assets in the current financial year in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. In addition the Department of the Environment (NI) also intend to apply the following methods—renewals accounting, reducing balance and accelerated depreciation. As part of the dry run audit, depreciation policies will be subject to review by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Use of these methods of depreciation is in accordance with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Northern Ireland Resource Accounting Manual, which follows private sector accounting practice as far as is appropriate. The requirements in the Manual, regarding depreciation policy, are underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15 "Tangible Fixed Assets" issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

"News at Ten"

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions he has had with the ITC in respect of News at Ten and its successor programmes; and if he will make a statement. [97597]

Mr. Chris Smith: Programme scheduling and content are of course matters for the broadcasters and the Independent Television Commission. I have however expressed the hope that, when the ITC reviews next Spring the conditions laid down as part of its approval of the ending of "News at Ten", it will be robust in its analysis of whether those conditions are being met.

National Lottery

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the practicality of compiling an analysis of National Lottery ticket sales on a constituency basis based on sales in postal districts. [97098]

Kate Hoey: My Department holds information only on gross ticket sales. Neither the National Lottery Commission nor my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State require an analysis of sales by constituency to fulfil their statutory objectives under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 (as amended). There is, therefore, no requirement for the National Lottery operator, Camelot Group plc, to provide the information in this format, and they have not done so.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the acquisition budgets in each of the last five years of the museums and galleries funded by his Department. [95145]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* Since 1992, the grant in aid allocation to each of the museums and galleries supported by DCMS has not included a separate acquisition budget. Decisions concerning the amount set aside for acquisitions are for the Trustees of each institution. Except for the Wallace Collection, which is a closed collection, details of the acquisition budgets of the other national museums and galleries for the last five years are given in their annual accounts which are available in the House of Commons Library. Regarding information for the other sponsored museums and galleries, I will write to the hon. Member and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Arts Council (Annual Report)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he expects the Arts Council of England to publish its 1998–99 Annual report. [97712]

Mr. Chris Smith: We expect that the Arts Council of England's Annual Report will be published in December.

Football Spectators

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made in eliminating racist behaviour among spectators at football matches. [97435]

Kate Hoey: I have been assured by the bodies identified in the Football Task Force Report "Eliminating Racism from Football", that they have implemented the Task Force's recommendations and I am monitoring the success of these initiatives.

National Arts Day

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *755*, on the National Arts Day, if the proposal for a National Arts Day meets his criteria. [97477]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* I have not to date been presented with any proposal for a national arts day that meets those criteria.

DEFENCE

European Security and Defence Identity

10. **Ms Rosie Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the European Security and Defence Identity. [96131]

24. **Ms McCafferty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the European security and defence identity. [96146]

Mr. Hoon: The Government are committed to strengthening the European Security and Defence Identity within NATO. We want European nations to improve their combined military capabilities and to develop the means to act in support of their foreign and security policy objectives. We are making good progress with our Allies and Partners both in the European Union and in NATO.

Marine Forces

11. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on collaboration between the Royal Marines and the Royal Netherlands Marine Force. [96132]

Mr. Spellar: The Royal Marines and the Royal Netherlands Marine Force have worked closely together for 26 years. This relationship was formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding signed in March 1997. Most recently, the UK Royal Marines and the Netherlands Royal Marines worked closely on Exercise BRIGHT STAR, an amphibious multinational exercise in Egypt last month.

Heavy-lift Aircraft

12. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the RAF's requirement for heavy-lift transport aircraft. [96133]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Strategic Defence Review concluded that we needed to improve our strategic airlift, to allow us to move forces quickly to an overseas theatre. We are considering solutions to both our short and long-term requirements. In the short term, we expect to do this through acquiring four C-17 aircraft or their equivalents. In the longer term, we would need a suitable replacement for our remaining transport aircraft. We expect to make an announcement early next year.

Multi-role Armoured Vehicle Project

13. **Mr. Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in concluding the multi-national agreement on the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle project; and if he will make a statement. [96134]

Mr. Kilfoyle: As announced on 5 November, the UK and Germany have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, and have placed a contract with ARTEC GmbH, a consortium including Alvis Vehicles Ltd. from the UK, for the development of a family of armoured utility vehicles, known in the UK as the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle.

Smart Procurement Initiative

14. **Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the Smart procurement initiative. [96135]

Mr. Hoon: Smart Procurement is at the heart of our effort to reform radically the way we acquire equipment capability. The programme to roll out Integrated Project Teams is on track with 33 now fully operational. 39 further teams formed up in September and 141 will be fully operational by April 2000.

Territorial Army

15. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the strength of the Territorial Army; and if he will make a statement. [96136]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Defence Review made a number of changes to the Territorial Army, including increases in support functions such as medical services and signallers. The new structure was implemented on 1 July this year, and is making the TA more relevant and useful. There are therefore no plans to change the conclusions reached on the size of the Territorial Army.

16. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding his plans for the mobilisation of TA units. [96137]

Mr. Spellar: We are examining the feasibility of deploying a formed TA unit or sub-units to sustain peace support operations in the Balkans. No decisions have yet been taken.

22. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently enlisted with the Territorial Army; how many there were five years ago; and what his projection is for the figures in 12 months' time. [96143]

Mr. Spellar: The strength of the Territorial Army as at 1 September, the latest date for which figures are available, was 45,047. The strength of the Territorial Army on 1 September 1994 was 61,047. These figures exclude Non Regular Permanent Staff.

The estimated strength of the Territorial Army in 12 months' time will be our target establishment of 41,200.

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact mobilisation of the Territorial Army would have upon the National Health Service. [97246]

Mr. Spellar: My Department and the Department of Health currently have work in hand to assess the implications for the National Health Service of deploying substantial numbers of Territorial Army and other medical Reservists on military operations.

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many more doctors he plans to recruit into the Territorial Army or reserve forces; and in what time span. [97244]

Mr. Spellar: At present, the three Services are seeking to recruit some 545 doctors into the Volunteer Reserve Forces to meet current shortfalls. There is no specific timescale for achieving this figure but the aim is to recruit the doctors as soon as possible.

Bosnia

17. **Lorna Fitzsimons:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on troop levels in Bosnia. [96138]

20. **Mr. Roy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on troop levels in Bosnia. [96141]

Mr. Hoon: The UK remains fully committed to supporting NATO operations in Bosnia. In conjunction with Allies, we have recently completed a careful assessment of the current security situation in Bosnia. This has improved sufficiently in the four years since the deployment of the Implementation Force (IFOR) for NATO to be able to move safely to a restructured force of some 20,000 members. The implication for UK forces is that 900 personnel will now return to the UK, without replacement, before Christmas. The UK contribution to the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) will then stand at some 3,300.

Kosovo and Serbia

18. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the environmental consequences of the conflict in Kosovo and Serbia. [96139]

Mr. Spellar: The UN's Balkans Task Force issued its report on the environmental consequences of the Kosovo conflict on 5 October. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House. This Government have not conducted a separate assessment of the environmental consequences of the conflict in Kosovo and Serbia.

Depleted Uranium

19. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of depleted uranium munitions. [96140]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has conducted extensive monitoring programmes of the environmental effects of depleted uranium munitions at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency's firing ranges at Eskmeals and Kirkcudbright. The monitoring programme has confirmed that there are only low levels of DU contamination, which are well below anything that could be considered a health hazard. The results of this monitoring are published annually.

Army Northern Headquarters

25. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the decision was made to transfer the Army's northern headquarters from York to Edinburgh. [96147]

Mr. Spellar: The decision to transfer the Army's northern HQ from York to Edinburgh was made on 4 March.

Learning Forces Initiative

26. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the learning forces initiative. [96148]

27. **Mr. Michael J. Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the learning forces initiative. [96149]

32. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the learning forces initiative. [96154]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) on 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, columns 683-84.

East Timor

28. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current security situation in East Timor. [96150]

Mr. Hoon: The security situation in East Timor is much improved. The Australian-led International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) has now reached a total strength of 8,100 personnel, and includes significant contributions from Canada, Fiji, South Korea, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, UK and the US. INTERFET has a firm base in Dili and is operating patrols along the border with West Timor. Remaining militia on the eastern side of the island, together with those based in West Timor, are still a cause for concern. The Indonesian Armed Forces have been co-operative. Some refugees have returned as peace is being restored. British Army Gurkhas have played an important role from the start of INTERFET operations in East Timor, and most recently in the Ambeno enclave. Gurkhas have been involved in conducting security patrols, facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance and providing medical relief.

Royal Navy

29. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on staff amenities and support services on board Royal Navy ships. [96151]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The staff amenities and support services on board Royal Naval ships vary widely according to their size, age and role. Typically, all ships are provided with mess and galley facilities together with recreational facilities such as TVs, video recorders, books and fitness equipment. As part of our policy for people, measures to improve the amenities on ships, including the extension of satellite TV, welfare communications and internet facilities where possible, are being progressed.

Front Line Logistics

30. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps the Government are taking to improve support to the front line in respect of logistics. [96152]

Mr. Spellar: Following the Strategic Defence Review, we have established the post of Chief of Logistics, to command a unified Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO), to replace the Single Service logistics commands. The DLO will be fully operational by April 2000, and has already begun to rationalise logistics and spread best practice across the Services. The DLO is involved in implementing the Smart Procurement Initiative, which aims to make the initial procurement of equipment and subsequent provision of spares, repairs and overhaul more efficient and responsive to the needs of the Services.

As part of the reorganisation of the management of logistics in my Department, we are creating two new Joint Force Logistic Component headquarters. The first is due to become operational in 2001 and the second in 2003. In addition, a number of new support units have been created to strengthen lines of communication, including two combat service support squadrons, a local resource section, a petroleum troop and a rations troop. In addition, our plans following SDR to create a fifth engineer logistic squadron have been brought forward from 2002 to late 2000.

Kosovo

31. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on future commitments in Kosovo. [96153]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Ms Follett) on 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 678.

Welfare Telephone Allowances

33. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps the Government are taking to improve service welfare telephone allowances. [96155]

Mr. Spellar: We recognise the importance of personnel deployed on operations being able to telephone home. We increased the free telephone allowance from 3 to 10 minutes in the Strategic Defence Review last year. The previous Secretary of State for Defence, Lord Robertson, announced on 28 September 1999 a further increase, doubling the allowance to 20 minutes a week. This was to take immediate effect and demonstrated our commitment to the welfare of Service personnel.

Iraq

34. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on UK forces' involvement in patrolling the no-fly zone in northern and southern Iraq. [96156]

Mr. Hoon: Coalition patrols of the no fly zones remain an essential humanitarian task in support of UN Security Council Resolution 688 as they prevent Saddam Hussein from using his airforce against the Iraqi people in the north and south. Since the end of Operation Desert Fox last December, Saddam has waged a systematic campaign against coalition aircraft carrying out these patrols. Some 215 Iraqi aircraft have violated the No Fly Zones, and there have been over 500 other direct threats against our aircrew, including missile attacks and heavy anti-aircraft fire. Coalition responses are limited strictly to proportionate action in self-defence against Iraqi weapons and facilities which pose a direct threat to our forces.

Overstretch

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to reduce the problem of overstretch. [96142]

Mr. Spellar: We remain firmly committed to tackling overstretch in the Armed Forces. Recruitment is improving and measures are under way to improve retention. These include improvements to the operational welfare package, for example: free telephone calls home, and a guaranteed period of post operational tour leave, as well as measures in support of families put in place through the role of the Service Families Task Force. We believe that measures such as these, combined with improved recruiting, and retention initiatives already in place, will help to reduce overstretch.

Apache Helicopters

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of the helmet pointing system being delivered with the Apache helicopters; how long he expects the helmet pointing system for the helicopters to be in service before being upgraded; and what the cost of the upgrade will be. [95346]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 8 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the helmet pointing system being delivered with the UK Apache helicopters. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

The cost of the helmet pointing system being delivered with the Apache helicopter is not separately identified within the package deal contract which was signed with GKN Westland Helicopter Ltd in March 1996, at a value of some £2Bn. There are no current plans to upgrade the system, but we continue to monitor developments in this field and are exploring opportunities to collaborate with the US Army in providing a longer term upgrade.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many orders for aircraft carriers he expects to place in the next year; and when tenders will be invited for such orders. [95512]

Mr. Hoon: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Frank Field, dated 8 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many orders for aircraft carriers he expects to place in the next year and when tenders will be invited. This matter falls to me for answer within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

The Strategic Defence Review set out our plans to replace our existing aircraft carriers from 2012 with two larger and more capable vessels. Tenders for the Assessment Phase of the programme, which will develop overall design proposals for the carriers, were released to industry in January 1999. Bids were received from two industry teams in May and, subject to the outcome of commercial negotiations, it is planned to place up to two contracts by the end of the year. Bids for the Demonstration and Manufacture Phase are expected in 2003 and contract placement is scheduled for 2004.

European Joint Procurement Structures

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what programmes are subject to European joint procurement structures. [96228]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, dated 8 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what programmes are subject to European joint procurement structures. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

The Counter Battery Radar (COBRA) is currently the only fully integrated programme involving the UK managed by a "European Joint Procurement Structure", the Organisme Conjoint de Cooperation en Matiere d'Armement (OCCAR). In addition, the Multi-Role Armoured Vehicle (MRAV), Medium Range TRIGAT and Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS) programmes have been nominated to move to OCCAR management, subject to agreeing satisfactory arrangements with the participating countries.

In addition, two programmes involving the UK are managed by NETMA, an organisation founded under the auspices of NATO but with European partners.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the European joint procurement structures which have been set up and those which are due to be set up over the next year. [96225]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, dated 8 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will list the European joint procurement structures which have been set up and those which are due to be set up over the next year. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

The Organisme Conjoint de Cooperation en Matiere d'Armement (OCCAR) is currently the only European joint defence procurement structure involving the UK. It was established by Treaty in September 1998. In addition, the Eurofighter and Tornado programmes are managed by NETMA, an organisation founded under the auspices of NATO but with European partners.

Aldermaston

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what measures are to be implemented in building A12N at Aldermaston to ensure its continued safe operation until building A91 enters into service; [96425]

(2) what progress has been made in commissioning building A91 at Aldermaston; and if he will make a statement. [96423]

Mr. Spellar: Technical problems with A91 have delayed its active commissioning. A decision on the most appropriate way forward for the facility will not now be made until the new term operating contractor has been appointed and they have had the opportunity to consider the situation.

The existing A12N plant will be maintained to ensure the continued safe processing of radioactive material while options for A91 are being evaluated. A review has been carried out and some minor engineering improvements have been included in the current engineering work programme. The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and the Environment Agency have been consulted on both A12N and the difficulties with A91.

Strategic Airlift

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will break down the five bids for the abandoned strategic airlift competition indicating the capability and cost in each case; and what alternative approaches to the strategic airlift capability the Defence Procurement Agency is seeking and from which companies. [96746]

Mr. Hoon: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 8 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence in which you asked if he will provide a breakdown of the five bids received in response to the Short Term Strategic Airlift competition and what alternative approaches the Defence Procurement Agency is seeking to fulfil this requirement. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

In answer to the first part of your question, I provide below details of the bidders and the aircraft they proposed for the terminated competition:

Airbus Transport International (ATI) offering a beluga and conventional freighters.

An Air Foyle Ltd-led consortium offering a yet-to-be developed version of the Antonov An-124.

Boeing/BAe offering the C-17.

IBP Ltd offering the current standard Antonov An-124.

Rolls Royce offering a managed service provision.

I am withholding details of costs and capabilities offered under Exemption 13 (third party's commercial confidences) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

In answer to the second part of your question, the Defence Procurement Agency is exploring other possible options for meeting our Airlift requirement, with the intention of reaching a decision in early 2000. This includes discussions with Boeing and the USAF on acquiring a C-17 capability through commercial lease or alternative arrangements and discussions with Air Foyle Ltd and Heavy Lift Cargo Airlines Ltd on more assured short-term chartering. A third company has now withdrawn its interest. The companies were requested to submit proposals by 29 October.

Soldiers (Service Extension)

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of soldiers serving for three years extended their service beyond three years by *(a)* three, *(b)* six, and *(c)* nine years in each of the last five years. [97518]

Mr. Spellar: Soldiers enlisting into the Regular Army since 1991 have done so on the Open Engagement (up to 22 years), which commits them to a minimum of three years service (four years for those enlisting after 2 November 1999). Continuation of service beyond that point is subject to the wishes of the individual and the needs of the Army. There is no requirement for soldiers to specify the length of any further commitment, but they are normally required to give 12 months notice of their wish to leave.

The information is not, therefore, available in the form requested. The table, however, identify the average soldier trained strength in each of the last five financial years, by length of reckonable service, and as a percentage of the total trained soldier strength.

Length of reckonable service (years)[1]	*Average trained strength*[2]	*Percentage of total strength*
(a) 1998–99		
Less than 3 years	17,932	21
3–5 years	13,570	16
6–8 years	13,216	16
9–11 years	13,510	16
12+ years	25,949	31
Total	84,177	100
(b) 1997–98		
Less than 3 years	16,107	19
3–5 years	14,821	17
6–8 years	15,745	19
9–11 years	13,332	16
12+ years	24,882	29
Total	84,887	100
(c) 1996–97		
Less than 3 years	14,604	17
3–5 years	17,094	20
6–8 years	17,588	20
9–11 years	12,935	15
12+ years	23,676	28
Total	85,897	100
(d) 1995–96		
Less than 3 years	15,406	17
3–5 years	20,310	23
6–8 years	18,106	20
9–11 years	12,637	14
12+ years	22,656	26
Total	89,115	100
(e) 1994–95		
Less than 3 years	18,330	19
3–5 years	23,662	24
6–8 years	18,171	19
9–11 years	12,669	13
12+ years	23,977	25
Total	96,809	100

[1] UK Trained Army Personnel (soldiers) only.

[2] The Strengths are calculated by adding together the start and end strengths of each financial year, and dividing by two.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the extension of the minimum commitment for soldiers from three to four years will have on pay differentials for those signing on for an extended three, six or nine years. [97519]

Mr. Spellar: The extension of the minimum commitment for soldiers from three to four years will have no effect on pay differentials. Soldiers have been enlisted on open engagements since 1 January 1991 and pay differentials for initial engagements of three, six or nine years have not applied since that date.

Patten Commission

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution the armed forces made to the Patten Commission on policing in Northern Ireland. [97558]

Mr. Spellar: The Patten Commission on Policing received a briefing on the role of the Armed Forces in Northern Ireland and the support they provide to the Royal Ulster Constabulary on 2 October 1998.

Service Personnel (Turnover)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the inflow and outflow rates for *(a)* the Territorial Army, *(b)* the Royal Naval Reserve and *(c)* the Royal Auxiliary Airforce for (i) officers and (ii) other ranks, for each of the years from 1994–95 to date. [97661]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Sexual Discrimination Cases

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sexual discrimination cases involving his Department are pending before *(a)* the European Court of Justice and *(b)* the European Court of Human Rights. [97666]

Mr. Spellar: There are no cases pending before either Court.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sexual discrimination cases have been brought against his Department in industrial tribunals since 1 February 1995; in how many such cases rulings were made against his Department; how much financial compensation was paid in each case; and how many cases are awaiting decision. [97668]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested relating to Industrial (now Employment) Tribunal applications together with details of compensation paid is available only for applications made by serving members, or former members, of the Armed Forces, since 1996–1997 when complete records began to be kept. The information provided does not include those applications submitted by MOD civilian and former civilian staff to Employment Tribunals, for which information is not held centrally.

Legal advice is taken on all cases and where a thorough and objective assessment of the case proves that there is a legal liability to pay compensation we do so. In such cases, the Ministry of Defence would hope to avoid cases proceeding to a full Tribunal hearing. My Department is currently handling 35 Employment Tribunal cases for sexual discrimination, two of which have been listed for full hearings.

The following figures exclude Employment Tribunal applications from those Servicewomen who were obliged to leave the Services on grounds of pregnancy. All 5,038 of these claims received have been settled in full at a cost of £60,279,782.

	Number of Employment Tribunal applications received in period	Number of Employment Tribunal cases settled/ repudiated in period	Compensation paid in period (£)
1996–97	58	15 settled 15 repudiated	260,000
1997–98	57	16 settled 25 repudiated	271,000
1998–99	25	14 settled 20 repudiated	425,000
1999–2000[1]	12	1 settled 7 repudiated	1,000

[1] To 4 November 1999

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sexual discrimination complaints against his Department since 1 February 1995 *(a)* have been made under service redress procedures, *(b)* were upheld by his Department at that stage, *(c)* came before industrial tribunals, *(d)* came before the European Court of Justice and *(e)* came before the European Court of Human Rights. [97664]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Service Personnel (Employment Protection)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has paid in employment protection to employers of members of *(a)* the Territorial Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy Reserve, *(c)* the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and *(d)* sponsored reservists mobilised in each year for which figures are available since 1989–90; and if he will make a statement. [97663]

Mr. Spellar: No payments are made to employers of members of the reserve forces for the purposes of employment protection. Under the terms of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 and the Reserve Forces (Call-out and Recall) (Financial Assistance) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997/309), employers may claim financial assistance for the loss of a member of staff who is mobilised for reserve service, and to cover any necessary retraining for that staff member on return. No financial assistance was provided to employers before 1 April 1997.

No awards of financial assistance have been made to employers of Royal Naval Reserve personnel as a result of called-out service since 1 April 1997.

It has not been possible to distinguish payments made to employers of TA personnel from those made to the employers of ex-Regular Army reserves. However, since 1 April 1997, the following totals have been paid to the employers of Army reservists:

Financial Year	Amount paid to employers (£)
1997–98	11,939
1998–99	64,762
1999–2000	[1]26,654

[1] As at end October 1999

Figures relating to employers' claims are available only for the Royal Auxiliary Air Force since June 1999. Since June 1999, payments totalling £7,158.27 have been made to employers of Royal Auxiliary Air Force reservists.

There are no Sponsored Reserves in service.

"Welfare in the Army"

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Major-General Spacie's report, "Welfare in the Army"; and when he intends to make the report public. [97660]

Mr. Spellar: As part of the development of an overarching Human Resources Strategy, the Army's approach to welfare has been subjected to a fundamental and comprehensive review. In 1998, Major-General (Retired) Spacie was commissioned to undertake a study into welfare provision across the Army. This work was completed in September 1999 and is currently being assessed. The study was commissioned to inform the Army's personnel management policies and there are currently no plans to publish the findings externally.

RAF Neatishead

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement about the future of RAF Neatishead, Norfolk. [97665]

Mr. Spellar: I expect to make an announcement shortly about the outcome of consultation relating to all of the rationalisation proposals affecting the RAF stations which make up the UK Air Surveillance and Control System (ASACS). This will of course include RAF Neatishead.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hawk Aircraft

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Hawk aircraft have arrived in Indonesia since the 16 September common position of the European Council; how many have been halted in transit; and what discussions he has held with representatives of *(a)* British industry, *(b)* overseas posts and *(c)* foreign agencies on the issue of halting Hawk transfers in transit. [97575]

Mr. Battle: Three Hawk aircraft were exported from the UK on 31 August, before the adoption of the Common Position. Once the aircraft left UK shores, we had no power to prevent delivery of these aircraft. No further Hawks have been exported from the UK while the embargo has been in place since 16 September.

Departmental Staff (Working Week)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average length of the working week in hours, broken down by grade, of staff in his Department *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* overseas. [97532]

Mr. Hain: The information requested by the hon. Member is not available. The conditioned hours of the Department's staff in the United Kingdom and overseas are 41 or 42 hours per week. However staff posted overseas have a 24 hour on-call liability.

International Criminal Court

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had concerning the implications for future British involvement in peacekeeping operations of ratification of the International Criminal Court. [97516]

Mr. Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office have worked closely together throughout the negotiations on the establishment of the International Criminal Court. The Government believe ratification of the Rome Statute will have no implications for future British involvement in peacekeeping operations.

Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the Middle East peace process. [97580]

Mr. Hain: The Sharm el-Sheikh agreement has created a real prospect of peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. The parties are committed to making a determined effort to conclude a Framework Agreement on Permanent Status issues by February, and to reaching a Permanent Status Agreement by September. We are confident that the permanent status negotiations, which have been formally resumed, will deliver substantive results.

Implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh commitments is proceeding, albeit with some short delays. A southern safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank was opened during my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's recent visit.

We do not underestimate the difficulties faced by both sides. Real vision will be needed to deliver a peace settlement which offers lasting security for Israel, and a real prospect of hope and prosperity for Palestinians.

Peace between Israel, Syria and Lebanon is an essential component of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We remain hopeful of a resumption of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

We stand ready to help in any way we can in the pursuit of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

St. Helena

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to extend full British citizenship to cover the population of St. Helena; and if he will make a statement. [97466]

Mr. Battle: The White Paper on Overseas Territories, published in March this year, sets out the Government's offer of British citizenship to those citizens of the Overseas Territories, including those of St. Helena, who do not already enjoy it and who meet certain conditions. This will require primary legislation. The issues are complex and the Government are working on the preparation of the necessary legislation.

Kosovo

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives Her Majesty's Government are taking to assist the civil prison service in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [97404]

Mr. Vaz: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department for International Development (DfID) arranged for a visit to Kosovo for Her Majesty's Prison Service experts in August to consider what assistance we could provide for prison administration. DfID is providing $1 million in repair assistance and has made available the DfID Emergency Engineering Unit to the United Nations and to the NATO-led international force in Kosovo (KFOR) to help repair prison facilities before winter sets in.

Two British prisons experts also went to Kosovo at the start of October for a two month visit to provide technical advice to the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) on the transfer of responsibility for prisons from KFOR to UNMIK, and the re-opening of prison facilities. DfID are also funding the secondment of four prison technical monitors to supervise local staff until February 2000.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many houses of the minorities have been burnt in Kosovo since the KFOR occupation. [96101]

Mr. Vaz: Between KFOR's arrival in Kosovo on 12 June 1999 and mid-October there have been 1,157 reported cases of arson. Figures disaggregated by ethnic group or property type are not available.

Chinese President (State Visit)

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people accompanied the Chinese President on his state visit, *(a)* arriving with him and *(b)* in advance; into which categories these people fell; and how many of them were known to his Department to be from the Chinese police or other security services. [97756]

Mr. Battle: The Chinese President was accompanied by 140 people froM China: 14 members of his official suite, 70 staff, 29 media correspondents and a plane crew of 27, all of whom arrived with the President. Thirty-five people had security responsibilities.

European Union Programme

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for November and *(b)* the major European Union events for the next six months. [96950]

Mr. Vaz *[pursuant to his reply, 29 October 1999, c. 1038–44]:* An administrative error led to an omission in my answer of 29 October to my hon. Friend. The correct answer should read as follows:

Monthly forecast of EU Business: November 1999

November 1999

2 November—Dubai—EU-Gulf Co-operation Council

(EU-GCC 9th Joint Council)

Opening Statement by the President of the Meeting (United Arab Emirates) and reply by the EU Presidency

Adoption by the Agenda

Implementation of the Co-operation Agreement

Free trade agreement negotiations

Exchange of views on developments in the two regions: European Union; Gulf Co-operation Council

Exchange of views on political questions of common interest

Approval of the Joint Communique and agreed minutes

Any other business

3–4 November—Brussels—European Parliamentary Plenary

Consultation Procedure

(possible) Proposal for a Council Decision concluding the Agreement for scientific and technological co-operation between the European Community and the People's Republic of China

(possible) Proposal for a Council Decision concluding the Agreement on co-operation for science and technology between the European Community and the government of the Russia Federation

(possible) Proposal for a Council Decision concluding the Agreement for scientific and technological co-operation between the European Community and the Argentine Republic

Codecision Procedure

Second Reading

(possible) Common position adopted by the Council with a view to adopting a European Parliament and Council Directive concerning the enforcement of seafarers' hours of work on board ships using Community ports

(possible) Common position adopted by the Council with a view to adopting a European Parliament and Council Directive amending Directive 93/104/EC concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time to cover sectors and activities excluded from that Directive

(possible) Common position adopted by the Council with a view to adopting a European Parliament and Council Directive relating to the availability of consumer information on fuel economy in respect of the marketing of new passenger cars.

8 November—Brussels—ECOFIN Council

Adoption of the provisional agenda

Approval of the list of "A" items

The Tax Package

(a) Taxation of Savings

Key issues; reports on Dependent or Associated Territories

(b) Code of Conduct on business taxation

state of play

(c) Interests and Royalties

(possible) Energy Taxation

Economic policy co-ordination

Draft Council report to European Council

EIB lending: Renewal of Community guarantee for projects in third countries

(possible) HIPC-initiative

The introduction of euro notes and coins

Common statement

Risk capital: Implementation of the Action Plan—Communication by the Commission

(possible) Own Resources Decision

The Employment package

Revised Joint Employment Report

Joint opinion of the EPC/ELC on the Employment Guidelines and Recommendations

AOB (p. m.—Euro 11; Macroeconomic dialogue)

8 November—Brussels—Consumer Affairs Council

Adoption of the agenda

(possible) Approval of the list of "A" items

Amended proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive concerning the distance marketing of consumer financial services and modifying Directives 97/7/EC and 98/27/EC (Legal basis proposed by Commission: Articles 47[2], 55 and 95) (Item on which a vote may be called for)

Common position

13097/98 CONSOM 76 ECOFIN 239 CODEC 622

10505/99 CONSOM 46 ECOFIN 136 CODEC 456

Implementation and application of consumer protection legislation

Information from the Commission on the implementation and application in the member states of certain Directives, in particular Directives on time-sharing and package holidays

Consumer access to justice

(a) Information from the Commission on the follow-up to its recommendation on the principles applicable to the mechanisms responsible for out-of-court settlements of consumer disputes

(b) Information from the Presidency on the European Council meeting in Tampere on 15 and 16 October 1999 as regards the item on citizen's access to justice

Food security

(a) Information campaign on food security in the member states

Progress report from the Commission

(b) "European Food 2000" seminar

(Helsinki, 23 and 24 September 1999)

Presidency briefing on the outcome

(c) Discussion

(15.00–16.00: open debate)

Consumer protection and services of general interest—Discussion

11682/99 CONSOM 49 MI 93

Other business

Transparency for the consumer in regard to civil liability for motor vehicles (automobile insurance)

contribution by the Italian delegation

9 November—Brussels—Industry Council

Adoption of the agenda

(possible) Approval of the list of "A" items

Competitiveness and entrepreneurial policy of the European Union

Debate and Council conclusions

(a) Commission communication entitled "Structural change and adjustment in European manufacturing"

11552/99 ECO 309

11706/99 ECO 317

(b) Competitiveness in the Information Society

(c) Medium-term programme for the organisation of an ongoing debate on industrial competitiveness

(d) SME

SME forum: Rapid growth and competitiveness through technology

Commission report on concerted action with the member states

Integration of sustainable development into EU industrial policy

Report to the Helsinki European Council

State of the competitiveness of the EU forest-based and related industries

Commission communication

Council conclusions 11707/99 ECO 318

Steel industry

(a) State of the competitiveness of the steel industry in the EU

Commission communication

Commission presentation

11708/99 SID 32 SOC 332 FIN 374 ECO 319

(b) Commission report to the Council on the monitoring of aid for steel covered by Article 95 of the Treaty

Information from the Commission

Shipbuilding

(a) Commission report on the international shipbuilding situation

Council conclusions 11919/99 RC 24

(b) Fourth Commission report to the Council on the monitoring of aid to certain shipyards currently being restructured in Germany and Spain

Commission presentation 11921/99 RC 26

White Paper on the modernisation of the rules laid down by Articles 85 and 86 of the Treaty—Commission briefing

Other business—State aids

Note from the Danish delegation

11855/99 ECO 323 FIN 379 RC 23 EEE 99

11 November—Brussels—Development Council

No agenda yet available

11 November—Brussels—Standing Committee on Employment

Rules of procedure

Confirmation of the Council's position

Co-ordinated strategy for employment

Commission Communication on Employment Guidelines for 2000

Draft Joint Report on Employment for 1999

Commission Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the implementation of member states' employment policies

The discussion will take account of the Community's economic and social objectives (i.e. the Broad Economic Guidelines).

11–12 November—Helsinki—Ministerial Conference on the Northern Dimension

No formal agenda

12 November—Brussels—Accession Conference

No formal agenda

12 November—Brussels—Labour and Social Affairs Council

Adoption of the provisional agenda

(possible) Approval of the list of "A" items

Employment

Proposal for Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies 2000

doc. 10992/99/ SOC 302 ECOFIN 159

Draft Joint Employment Report 1999

doc. 10993/99 SOC 303 ECOFIN 160 + COR1 (f)

Commission Recommendation for Council Recommendations on the Implementation of Member States' Employment Policies

doc. 10994/99 SOC 304 ECOFIN 161

Any other business

15–16 November—Brussels—Agriculture Council

Adoption of the agenda

Approval of the list of "A" items

Strategy on environmental integration and sustainable development in the common agricultural policy (in preparation for the Helsinki European Council on 11 and 12 December 1999) 12082/99 AGRI 165 ENV 360

Beef labelling

(a) Report by the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council on the situation regarding the implementation of beef-labelling systems in the different Member States (Art. 19(3) of Council Regulation (EC) No 820/97) 12031/99 AGRILEG 163

(b) Proposals for Regulations of the European Parliament and of the Council

establishing a system for the identification and registration of bovine animals and regarding the labelling of beef and beef products and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 820/97

amending Council Regulation (EC) No 820/97 establishing a system for the identification and registration of bovine animals and regarding the labelling of beef and beef products 12030/99 AGRILEG 162 CODEC 583

Progress report

Proposal for a Council Regulation on measures to promote and provide information on agricultural products in third countries (Item on which a vote may be requested)

(Legal basis: Art. 37 of the Treaty)

5386/99 AGRI 7 AGRIFIN 7

(possible) Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EEC) No 1765/92 establishing a support system for producers of certain arable crops (non-food) (Item on which a vote may be requested)

(Legal basis: Art. 36 and 37 of the Treaty)

11375/95 AGRIORG 249 AGRIFIN 220

(possible) Cotton: Proposals for Council Regulations

adjusting, for the sixth time, the system of aid for cotton introduced by Protocol 4 annexed to the Act of Accession of Greece

relating to the production aid for cotton

(possible) Commission information on the banana dossier

Extension of State aid for small producers

Austrian delegation's request for authorisation

Items Within the Competence of the Permanent Representatives Committee

Dioxin: Progress report

(possible) Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 64/432/EEC on health problems affecting intra-Community trade in bovine animals and swine

Other business

Use of hormones as growth promoters (request by the Danish delegation)

Equal opportunities for men and women and rural development (request by the Swedish delegation)

Organisation of future work

15–16 November—Brussels—General Affairs Council

Adoption of the provisional agenda

Approval of the list of "A" items

Horizontal Issues

Resolutions, decisions and opinions adopted by the European Parliament at its part-sessions in Strasbourg on 417 and 25129 October 1999

Electoral procedure

European Security and Defence Policy: elements for the Presidency report on military and non-military aspects of crisis management

Common Strategies

External Relations

Negotiations for a development partnership agreement with the ACP states

- preparation for the next Ministerial Conference

Follow-up of the EU-Russia Summit

Pakistan; Western Balkans; Indonesia

Bananas

WTO: Ministerial Conference in Seattle

AOB

Items Likely to Become "A" Points

Adoption of the EU position for the 12th meeting of the EEA Council

Adoption of the EU position for the Association Council with Tunisia (16 November 1999)

Adoption of the EU position for the 5th Association Council with Bulgaria (16 November 1999)

Adoption of the EU position for the second Co-operation Council with Moldova on 16 November 1999

(possible) European armaments policy: adoption of the common position

15–19 November—Strasbourg—European Parliament Plenary

No agenda yet available

16 November—Brussels—EEA Council

No agenda yet available

18 November—Brussels—Health Council

No agenda yet available

22 November—Brussels—Fisheries Council (possible)

No agenda yet available

23 November—Brussels—Culture/Audiovisual Council

No agenda yet available

23 November—Brussels—Youth Council

No agenda yet available

25–26 November—Brussels—Budget Council

No agenda yet available

26 November—Brussels—Education Council

No agenda yet available

29 November—Brussels—Labour and Social Affairs Council

No agenda yet available

29 November—Brussels—ECOFIN Council

Preparation of the European Council in Helsinki
Economic policy cooperation, report by the Council
Employment
Joint annual employment report of Council and Commission
Employment Guidelines 2000
Report on reinforced tax policy co-operation
Effective fight against fraud
Report by the Council
Tax Package
Code of Conduct (Business Taxation)
Final report
Taxation of Savings—Political agreement on Draft Directive
Interest and Royalties—Political agreement on Draft Directive
Implementation of Stability and Growth Pact
Financial Services Policy Group
Report by the Commission
Amendment of the UCITS Directive
Political agreement
Annual Report of the Court of Auditors concerning financial year 1998
EURO 11—Joint meeting with Labour and Social Affairs Council (Employment Guidelines 2000 and joint annual employment report)

30 November—Brussels—Telecommunications Council

No agenda yet available

30 November-3 December—Seattle—WTO Ministerial Conference

No formal agenda.

European Calendar: November 1999—April 2000

This calendar is primarily concerned with European Union matters, but certain other relevant events are also included. Events and dates quoted are based on the information available on the date of issue.

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
November 1999		
2	Dubai	EU-Gulf Co-operation Council (EU-GCC 9th Joint Council)
3–4	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
8	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
8	Brussels	Consumer Affairs Council
9	Brussels	Industry Council
11	Brussels	Development Council
11	Brussels	Standing Committee on Employment
11–12	Helsinki	Ministerial Conference on the Northern Dimension
12	Brussels	Accession Conference
12	Brussels	Labour and Social Affairs Council
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
15–16	Brussels	General Affairs Council
15–19	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
16	Brussels	EEA Council
18	Brussels	Health Council
22	Brussels	Fisheries Council (possible)
23	Brussels	Culture/Audiovisual Council
23	Brussels	Youth Council
25–26	Brussels	Budget Council
26	Brussels	Education Council
29	Brussels	Labour and Social Affairs Council
29	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
30	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
30 November-3 December	Seattle	WTO Ministerial Conference
December 1999		
30 November-3 December	Seattle	WTO Ministerial Conference
1–2 December	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
2	Brussels	Energy Council

Date	Venue	Event
2	Brussels	Research Council
2–3	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
6–7	Brussels	General Affairs Council
7	Brussels	Internal Market Council
7	Brussels	Accession Conference
7–8	Brussels	EU-ACP Ministerial Meeting (probable)
9–10	Brussels	Transport Council
10–11	Helsinki	European Council
13	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
13–14	Brussels	Environment Council
13–17	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
14–15	Brussels	Agriculture Council
14–16	Brussels	Ministerial Conference on Follow-up of Progress on UN Beijing Platform for Action
16–17	Brussels	Fisheries Council
January 2000		
14	Brussels	Fisheries Council
17–21	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
18	Brussels	Budget Council
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs Council
24–25	Brussels	Agriculture Council
28–29	Lisbon	Development Council (Informal)
31	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
February 2000		
2–3	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
11–12	Lisbon	Social Affairs Council (Informal)
14–15	Brussels	General Affairs Council
14–18	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
21–22	Brussels	Agriculture Council
21–23	Vilamoura	San Jose Meeting
23–25	Vilamoura	Rio Group Meeting
28	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
March 2000		
1–2	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
3–4	Lisbon	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Informal)
9	Brussels	European Conference
13	Brussels	Social Affairs/ECOFIN Council
13–17	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
16	Brussels	Internal Market Council
20–21	Brussels	General Affairs Council
20–21	Brussels	Agriculture Council
23–24	Lisbon	European Council
27	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
28	Brussels	Transport Council
29–30	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
30	Brussels	Environment Council
April 2000		
3	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
4	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
4	Cairo	EU-Africa Summit
7–8	Luxembourg	ECOFIN Council (Informal)
10–11	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
10–14	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
13	Luxembourg	Consumer Affairs Council
15–16	Oporto	Environment Council (Informal)
17–18	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council

HOME DEPARTMENT

"Picking up the Pieces"

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Picking up the Pieces III report from local authorities dated 11 to 13 January. [97273]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Office broadly supports the work this group is undertaking to develop better post-disaster psycho-social care arrangements.

Drug-related Crime

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what range of national initiatives Her Majesty's Government have employed to reduce drug-related crime since 1997.A [94523]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[pursuant to his reply, 19 October 1999, c.436]:* One of the four Key Aims of the Government's drugs strategy is to protect communities from drug related crime. National initiatives introduced since 1997 include the piloting of the new Drug Treatment and Testing Order, for which around £60 million has been earmarked for national roll-out from next year; the Prison Service has been given £76 million over the next three years for tackling drug misuse in prisons, of which in the region of £60 million has been allocated to drug treatment programmes, and up to £20 million over the next three years is being made available to assist in the development of arrest referral schemes to get drug misusing offenders into treatment.

Travellers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the results of his examination of guidance on the exercise of powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 by the DETR and his Department relating to travellers. [97384]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has asked for the good practice document "Managing Unauthorised Camping", published jointly by the Home Office and the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) in 1998, to be reviewed. This is being carried forward with the DETR and the results will be announced in due course.

Asylum and Immigration

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what options are available to visitors to the UK who are refused entry and who have no right of appeal against the decision; what steps are taken to make such visitors and their sponsors in the UK aware of those options before they are required to leave the country; and if it is the practice to stamp passports with a symbol indicating that entry has been refused before the visitor has had the opportunity to exercise such options. [97446]

Mrs. Roche: A person seeking entry as a visitor, but refused leave to enter is informed in writing that they may contact their High Commission or Consul or anyone else they think may be able to help them. A chief immigration officer will consider any representations made before a

person's departure. It is normal practice to endorse the passport of a person refused leave to enter at the time the decision is made.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to police forces about sharing information with local housing authorities about persons with previous convictions for burglary who are applying for local authority housing so that those authorities can consider whether to make an offer of accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [97036]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, local housing authorities are required to have an allocation scheme which sets out their procedures and priorities for allocating social housing. There are a number of classes of household or person who must be given "reasonable preference" under an allocation scheme. This framework is designed to ensure that priority for subsidised housing is given to those with the greatest need.

Authorities have the power to define which classes of people are eligible for local authority housing. When deciding which classes of people should be non-qualifying, they are entitled to decide on the basis of objective criteria and evidence, whether granting a tenancy to a person is likely to result in disruption to the stability of the community.

The Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions' "Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on the Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness", which will be published shortly, will recommend that any decision to exclude classes of persons on the grounds of the need to protect the community or reduce levels of crime on an estate should be taken in consultation with relevant organisations in the criminal justice system, in particular the police and probation services.

We shall consider the need for further guidance on the disclosure of information by the police if necessary.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the draft Freedom of Information Bill to accommodate commitments on environmental information disclosure contained in EU directives and the Aarhus Convention on Access to Environmental Information. [97364]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The consultation paper on the draft Freedom of Information Bill (published 24 May 1999) set out the Government's intention to modify as necessary the general right of access in the Freedom of Information Bill in order to implement the Aarhus Convention (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters) insofar as it relates to access to environmental information.

The Bill will now contain a provision giving power to the Secretary of State to make regulations to give effect to the Aarhus Convention as it relates to access to environmental information. Ministers have agreed to this change of approach. This will allow for the creation of a free-standing regime for environmental information which will give effect to the Aarhus Convention and the existing European Community Directive on Freedom of Access to Information on the Environment. The current regulations will be revoked.

Access to environmental information will, therefore, be given in the first instance under the regulations rather than the Bill itself. Freedom of Information legislation will continue to have an effect, however, by placing a duty on authorities to consider any discretion they may have to disclose information in the public interest where it is otherwise exempt under the regulations.

Firearms Compensation

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claims made for compensation for the surrender of handguns and ammunition have *(a)* been settled and *(b)* remain outstanding; what has been the total compensation paid to date; and what the final figure is expected to be. [97545]

Mr. Charles Clarke: As at the end of October, a total of 74,597 claims under the firearms compensation and ex gratia payment schemes had been paid. There are currently 966 claims outstanding, of which 800 are ones where payment offers have been made to the claimants in question and are awaiting acceptance. A total of £88.96 million has been paid out and the final figure is expected to be approximately £90 million.

Motoring Offences

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use has been made of restorative justice in response to motoring offences involving injury or loss to third parties. [96636]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Where it judges it appropriate and proportional, a court can make a probation order for a motoring offence. Probation service motoring programmes typically include sessions on raising offenders' awareness of the impact on victims. Such programmes often include police or hospital staff presenting information about the impact and injuries resulting from motoring offences and the consequences for victims.

The Crime Reduction Programme announced last year, contains a restorative justice component. It is evaluating a number of existing restorative justice schemes in order to identify which elements or combination of elements are most effective in reducing crime and at what cost. Some of the schemes will include offenders who have committed motoring offences.

Defence Exports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy is on the manufacture for sale abroad by UK companies of defence and security goods that are illegal in the UK; what action is taken against such companies; and if he will make a statement. [97483]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The kinds of weapons used by military and security forces are prohibited under the provisions of section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968. This

means that no company may manufacture such weapons without the written authority of the Secretary of State. In order to obtain such an authority, an applicant must show that there is a compelling reason for possessing prohibited weapons, that the applicant is fit to be entrusted with prohibited weapons and that they will be stored under conditions of security commensurate with the danger to the public posed by such weapons.

Authorities are carefully conditioned to restrict to the minimum genuinely needed, the numbers and types of prohibited weapons the authority holder is allowed to possess. They are also specifically conditioned to restrict the purposes for which the holder may possess prohibited weapons and how the weapons may be disposed of.

It is an offence punishable by up to six months' imprisonment, a fine of up to £5,000 or both for a person to breach any of the conditions of an authority. Unauthorised possession of prohibited weapons is punishable by up to ten years' imprisonment, a fine or both. Where it is believed that an offence may have been committed, the information would be passed to the police for investigation. Any decision on whether or not to prosecute in an individual case is a matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Export sales of such weapons are subject to the export licensing regime. Applications for export licences for prohibited weapons are considered carefully by the Department of Trade and Industry in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence.

Cross-examination

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to implement sections 40 and 41 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. [97408]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Sections 34–40 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provide protection for witnesses from cross-examination by the accused in person. Sections 41–43 provide restrictions on evidence or questions about the complainant's sexual history in proceedings for sexual offences. Rules of Court will be required to govern procedures relating to applications made under both these sets of provisions, and these are currently being prepared with a view to implementation in Spring 2000.

Police Firearms

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the past five years a Metropolitan Police vehicle has been damaged consequent to the firing of police small arms during an operation; and if he will make a statement. [97407]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Metropolitan Police Commissioner tells me that the information requested is not recorded centrally.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the past five years a firearm held by a Metropolitan Police officer has been fired accidentally in an operational situation; and if he will make a statement. [97398]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Metropolitan Police Commissioner tells me that since 1994, there have been six occasions when a firearm has been discharged accidentally by a Metropolitan Police officer, when employed on an operation.

Corporate Manslaughter

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to consult on proposals for a new criminal offence of corporate manslaughter; and if he will make a statement. [97217]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We are considering what action to take in the light of the Law Commission's report on Involuntary Manslaughter which includes proposals in relation to corporate manslaughter. We will make our proposals known shortly.

West Midlands Police Authority

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on plans for an upper age limit for lay visitors within the area of the West Midlands Police Authority. [97216]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Lay visiting is the responsibility of individual police authorities and each scheme must evolve to suit local circumstances. The West Midlands Police Authority began introducing an upper age limit of 70 for lay visitors from October 1998.

Current Home Office guidance to police authorities on lay visiting makes no reference to age limits. However, the separate guidance issued for the Metropolitan Police area states that persons who are under the age of 18 or over the age of 70 will not normally be appointed. All this Home Office guidance, which is advisory, is shortly to be reviewed and the arguments for and against age limits will be considered as part of that process.

Data Protection

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his plans for publishing on the Internet further draft statutory instruments to be made under the Data Protection Act 1998. [97886]

Mr. Straw: Drafts of a further six statutory instruments will be published on the Internet at www.homeoffice.gov.uk on Tuesday 9 November. I am also placing copies in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Internal Histories

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those internal histories *(a)* commissioned under his Government and *(b)* currently in progress. [95307]

The Prime Minister: No central record is required for histories commissioned by Departments for their own purposes. Two internal histories have been commissioned since the General Election and work on them is under way. It is the established practice under section 10 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to a planned or

potential publication. After completion, consideration will be given on an individual basis under the Public Records Acts for their release to the Public Record Office.

Bilderberg Meetings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what official records are kept of attendance by Government Ministers at Bilderberg meetings. [95784]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him of 20 May 1999, *Official Report*, column *402*. Records of meetings attended by Government Ministers are not held centrally.

Pensions

Mr. Trend: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 20 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 435, what the basis was for his statement that the average pensioner is currently receiving more than if pensions had been indexed to earnings. [96031]

The Prime Minister: In the first three years of this Parliament, pensioners will have received an extra £1.6 billion through the new Winter Fuel Payments and the introduction of the Minimum Income Guarantee. This is more than twice the amount that pensioners would have received from uprating the basic state pension in line with earnings rather than prices.

As well as being worth more than uprating, our policies for pensioners strike a better balance between benefiting all pensioners and getting more help to those in greatest need. The £100 Winter Fuel Payment goes to every pensioner household, regardless of their income. The Minimum Guarantee means even more help for pensioners on low incomes.

Special Advisers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the annual salary of each special adviser employed at 10 Downing Street for each year since 1 May 1997. [96875]

The Prime Minister: Special Advisers are paid individually negotiated salaries within a published pay range as follows:

	Salaries
1997–1998	£24,349 to £73,484
1998–1999	£26,000 to £76,056
1999–2000	£26,728 to £78,186

In line with the practice of previous Administrations, the salaries of individual Special Advisers are not disclosed as this would breach the privacy of the individuals concerned. The exceptions are two of my Advisers—Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell—who have additional executive responsibilities and are paid outside this range. Their salaries are each as follows:

	Salaries
1997–1998	£87,936
1998–1999	£91,014
1999–2000	£93,562

Animal Welfare

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *29*, on animal welfare, if the inter-departmental minister group on animal welfare has now been established; if he will list its membership; and if he will set out its terms of reference. [96496]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Work is under way and continuing on the establishment of inter-departmental ministerial group on animal welfare and an announcement will be made shortly.

Media Briefings

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister under what circumstances Permanent Secretaries are permitted to brief the media personally. [96712]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Permanent Secretaries may brief the media on their official responsibilities and they have often done so in relation to their management roles.

Press Secretary

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if the Press Secretary to the Prime Minister can issue instructions to departmental heads of information. [96339]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* My Chief Press Secretary is appointed under Article 3(3) of the Civil Service (Amendment) Order in Council 1997, which provides him with the necessary executive powers to direct civil servants as appropriate.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the dates on which the Press Secretary to the Prime Minister has met departmental heads of information since 1 May 1997. [96337]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* My Chief Press Secretary has set up a system of weekly co-ordination meetings between No. 10 and heads of departmental planning units and in addition holds strategy meetings periodically with heads of information to ensure effective co-ordination and presentation of Government policy.

Chinese President (State Visit)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister for what reason Rupert Murdoch was invited to lunch at 10 Downing Street on the occasion of the visit there of President Jiang Zemin; if Tibet was discussed at that meeting; and if he will make a statement. [96340]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Mr. Murdoch was one of a number of business people with interests in China invited to the lunch. On my discussions with President Jiang Zemin about Tibet, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) on 1 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *4*.

Departmental Leak Investigations

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the departmental leak investigations in progress, specifying in each case the nature of material leaked. [96343]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* I am aware of seven leak investigations that are in progress in Government Departments. They involve various types of material including internal departmental policy documents, operational information and legal advice to a Department. Each Department is responsible for its own security arrangements, including leak investigations.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister how many leak investigations have been instigated since 1 May 1997; how many have identified the culprit; and what action has been taken in each case. [96344]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Government Departments have notified the Cabinet Office of a total of 58 leak investigations since 1 May 1997. It has been the normal practice of successive Governments not to disclose information on the outcome of investigations.

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to the recent petition presented to him about deaths in custody; and if he will make a statement. [97148]

The Prime Minister: It is customary when petitions are delivered to my Office for the relevant Government Department to be informed and where appropriate passed to them for consideration. In this case my Office passed the petition to the Home Office in order to draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, whom I understand met representatives of the United Families and Friends Campaign earlier this year.

Intergovernmental Conference

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Prime Minister further to his reply to the hon. Member for Buckingham of 26 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 772, on the intergovernmental conference, if it is his Government's policy to seek a review of the Common Fisheries Policy prior to 2002. [97564]

The Prime Minister: The preparatory stage of the review of the Common Fisheries Policy which is due to conclude by the end of 2002 has already started.

Infant Deaths

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will meet representatives of the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths to discuss ways in which there could be a more coherent public service response to the causes of unexpected infant deaths. [97716]

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the Foundation's excellent work in improving our understanding of the causes of unexpected infant deaths and in prompting an appropriate public response. I understand that the Foundation has developed a strong working relationship with officials at the Department of Health. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health would be happy to meet with representatives of the Foundation should they wish to do so.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to combine the responsibilities of the Home Office and Department of Health with those of other departments in order *(a)* to institute infant death response teams of trained police and specialist nurses to visit and support families within 24 hours, *(b)* to provide for inquests held by specialist pathologists and *(c)* to institute case conferences to consider and agree the cause of death. [97715]

The Prime Minister: The tragedy of death in infancy calls upon the expertise of a number of agencies with shared responsibility for supporting parents who have suffered bereavement. It is already accepted good practice for bereaved families to be visited by a police officer attached to the Coroner's Office and a nurse experienced in bereavement counselling. The benefit of a specialist pathology service for inquests into infant deaths has been recognised and I understand that closer working relationships between paediatric and forensic pathologists are being developed to this end. It is the duty of the Coroner to consider and identify the cause of death.

Official Engagements

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what his official engagements were between 3.30 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Wednesday 3 November. [97748]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) in the House on 3 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 285. At 7 p.m. I voted in the division following the debate on Lords Amendment 42 to the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

Foudry Court Elderly Persons Home

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister which department will answer the letter from the hon. Member for North Essex to him of 29 July concerning the threatened closure of Foudry Court Elderly Persons Home; when it will do so; and which department has responsibility for care of the elderly. [97746]

The Prime Minister: The Minister of State, Department of Health, has replied to the hon. Member today. The Department of Health has responsibility for the health and social care of the elderly.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Belize

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development to what projects and in what proportions the United Kingdom's overseas aid to Belize was allocated in each of the years 1990 to 1997. [96178]

Clare Short: The requested information is shown:

Year	*UK assistance to Belize (£000)*	*Percentage of total UK bilateral assistance*
1990–91	6,016	0.508
1991–92	3,674	0.312
1992–93	4,498	0.332
1993–94	6,233	0.473

Year	UK assistance to Belize (£000)	Percentage of total UK bilateral assistance
1994–95	[1]16,886	1.223
1995–96	6,335	0.446
1996–97	7,666	0:595
1997–98	2,383	0.176

[1] This figure reflects a large CDC investment of £11,487,000—the bulk of which went on hydro-electric power

Note:

This expenditure was predominantly in the following sectors: Agriculture and Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Roads, Energy, Public Administration and Education.

Departmental Asset Sales

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list assets sold by her Department and their value item by item in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99; and if she will estimate the value of asset sales planned to be made in 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [97723]

Clare Short: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

St. Helena

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures she proposes to *(a)* increase the standard of living of the residents of St. Helena and *(b)* improve access to St. Helena; and if she will make a statement. [97385]

Clare Short: The framework for St. Helena's development over the period 1997/98–1999/2000, and the level and scope of HMG development assistance, is set out in the Country Policy Plan agreed by HMG and the St. Helena Government in 1997 (a copy of which is in the Library). A new Country Policy Plan (CPP), for the period 2000/01–2003/04, is scheduled to be agreed by the end of 1999. Discussions on the new CPP and on access issues will take place on St. Helena between 2–10 December 1999.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Historic Churches

40. **Mr. Woodward:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations he has made to Ministers on the reduction of VAT on conversion schemes for historic churches. [96163]

Mr. Stuart Bell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for the Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman). I have raised the Church's concerns directly with my colleagues at the Treasury responsible for the oversight of the ongoing review of charity taxation. Following the latest submission of evidence and the overwhelming support given by General Synod to changes in the VAT regime as it affects the Church, we have written to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury seeking a meeting to expand on the thrust of the Church's case.

42. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations he has made to Ministers on the reduction of VAT on conversion projects for historic churches. [96165]

Mr. Stuart Bell: I refer to my answer given to the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward). As the representative of the Church Commissioners, I am in frequent touch with colleagues in Government and have raised the Church's concerns in connection with VAT and listed buildings in support of the various submissions made by the Church to the ongoing charity tax review.

GM Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on his policy on the use of land for which the Church Commissioners are responsible for the cultivation of GM crops. [96157]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The issue of whether Commissioners' land should be leased to allow trials of genetically modified crops to take place is being initially considered by the Church's Ethical Investment Working Group (EIWG), which develops a co-ordinated investment policy for the Church. The EIWG has been studying and consulting widely on the potential impact genetically modified technology could have on current farming practices, biodiversity and the environment. It has not yet concluded its research.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal (Young People)

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by unit of delivery the number of jobs lasting less than 13 weeks gained by 18–24 year olds from the New Deal since January 1998. [95088]

Ms Jowell: The information showing the number of young people who had gained a job from New Deal and returned to claim the Jobseekers Allowance or returned to a New Deal Option within 13 weeks, by Unit of Delivery, is given in the following table. The figures include both subsidised and unsubsidised jobs. Also shown are the numbers gaining jobs that were sustained, lasting for 13 weeks or more. Job turnover is normal in a healthy labour market, especially among young people who need to try different jobs and accumulate experience to establish themselves successfully in the labour market. It is vital that those young people returning to unemployment after a short spell in work are given the support and encouragement they need to build on that experience and use it to find another job quickly. It is this kind of sustained help that sets New Deal above previous labour market policies.

From January 1998 to the end of July 1999

Unit of delivery	*Young people into jobs lasting less than 13 weeks*	*Young people into jobs lasting 13 weeks or more*
Scotland		
Tayside	439	1,247
Ayrshire	400	1,087
Borders	71	204
Dumfries & Galloway	96	319
Dunbarton	185	511
Edinburgh, East & Mid Lothian	321	885
Fife	309	803
Forth Valley	230	654
Glasgow	687	1,606
Grampian	149	355
Moray, Strathspay & Badenoch	66	128
Lanarkshire	638	1,708
Renfrewshire	311	643
West Lothian	133	311
Argyll & The Islands	42	148
Caithness & Sutherland	16	56
Inverness & Nairn	38	116
Lochaber	8	37
Western Isles	13	65
Orkney	5	26
Ross & Cromarty	26	115
Shetland	5	18
Skye & Lochalsh	5	26
Northern Region		
Newcastle, Gateshead & South Tyneside	657	2,077
Northumberland	174	617
Tyneside North	148	456
Durham North & Durham South	582	1,593
City of Sunderland formerly Wearside	330	865
Tees North & Tees South	657	1,437
North West Region		
Cumbria	371	1,305
Wirral	432	1,194
Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre	134	349
Bolton	168	376
Bury	93	216
Central Lancashire	208	456
Cheshire	276	678
City Pride Manchester	873	2,167
East Lancashire	312	786
Halton & Warrington	223	557
Knowsley	237	725
Liverpool	614	1,886
North Lancashire	104	322
Oldham	158	366
Rochdale	175	509
Sefton	202	789
St. Helens	155	419
Stockport	123	383
W. Lancashire	94	198
Wigan	193	576
Yorkshire and Humberside Region		
Sheffield	430	1,346
Rotherham	348	1,030
South Humber	500	1,002
Calderdale & Kirklees	498	1,163
Barnsley & The Dearne	331	894
Bradford	445	1,250
Hull & East Coast formerly Hull	651	1,571
Leeds	482	1,070
North Yorkshire	267	802
Wakefield & Doncaster	626	1,626
Wales		
West Wales	258	902
Swansea	329	1,170
North West Wales	162	676
Powys	39	123
Ceredigion	28	171
North East Wales formerly Flintshire & Wrexham	138	436
North Wales Coast	81	312
Cardiff & Vale	301	775
Bridgend & Glamorgan Valleys	322	892
Heads of the Valley & Caerphilly	356	1,042
Newport, Torfaen & Monmouth	280	625
West Midlands		
Black Country	1,116	2,903
Birmingham	766	2,090
Solihull	113	274
Staffordshire	575	1,416
Hereford & Worcester	260	799
Coventry	212	671
Warwickshire	129	352
Shropshire	225	487
East Midlands		
Southern Derbyshire	380	1,076
Cambridge TTWA	133	391
North Derbyshire	226	683
Leicestershire	330	919
Lincolnshire	246	759
Norfolk	326	967
West Norfolk	61	201
Northamptonshire	205	564
Greater Nottingham	430	1,122
North Nottinghamshire	302	742
Peterborough	186	439
Suffolk	177	498
Waveney	100	243
South West Region		
Cornwall	408	1,690
Bath & NE Somerset and N. Somerset	128	383
Bristol & South Gloucestershire formerly Central Bristol	310	822
Dorset	228	760
Exeter & East Devon	149	403
Torbay & South Devon formerly South Devon	156	548
North Devon	96	289
Gloucesterhisre	189	581
Plymouth	272	823
Somerset	197	569
Wiltshire & Swindon formerly Wiltshire	185	525
London and South East Region		
Eastbourne & Hastings formerly Eastbourne	209	547
Lambeth	271	796
Harlow	43	123

From January 1998 to the end of July 1999

Unit of delivery	*Young people into jobs lasting less than 13 weeks*	*Young people into jobs lasting 13 weeks or more*
Hackney & City	311	978
Hertfordshire	217	837
Brighton	165	528
Canterbury	180	541
Channel	174	474
Chatham	300	889
Crawley	41	130
Croydon & Bromley	337	954
Guildford	78	283
Lewisham	246	718
Maidstone, Dartford & West Kent	160	516
Southwark	221	584
Greenwich	188	575
Bexley	91	262
Sutton, Merton, Esher, Kingston, Epsom	204	604
Wandsworth	130	331
West Sussex Coastal Plain	60	238
South Essex	397	1,249
North Essex formerly North & Mid Essex	241	763
Edgware & Leaside	323	1,165
North East London	268	931
Havering, Barking & Dagenham	196	564
Newham	230	717
Tower Hamlets	170	608
Camden & North Islington	195	696
Ealing & Hillingdon formerly Ealing	185	592
Bedfordshire & Luton	215	562
Milton Keynes & N. Buckinghamshire	67	202
Mid Hants	36	167
Oxfordshire	90	290
Portsmouth & SE Hampshire	254	666
Isle of Wight	80	329
Reading	110	214
Slough	184	459
Southampton & SW Hampshire	165	497
Wembley	213	707
Westminster	51	191
Hounslow & Richmond	116	345
Hammersmith, Fulham, Kensington, Chelsea	114	407
Great Britain[1]	35,100	99,466

[1] Denotes a private sector led Unit of Delivery

Note:
Great Britain excludes those for whom no Unit of Delivery is recorded on the New Deal Evaluation Database

Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

New Deal (Lone Parents)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many lone parents had been invited to join the New Deal for Lone Parents by the end of July. [95515]

Ms Hodge: The number of lone parents invited to join the New Deal for Lone Parents between the national roll-out of the programme on 26 October 1998 and the end of July was 406,440. The total number of invitations, including the earlier pilot phases of the programme which began on 21 July 1997, is 457,052. Letters inviting participation in the New Deal for Lone Parents programme are sent to lone parents who are in receipt of Income Support and whose youngest child is aged at least 5 years and 3 months. Some 80,130 lone parents have attended an initial interview (including those outside the target group and early starters who did not receive an invite) and some 89 per cent. of these agreed to join the caseload and 26 per cent. of these have found jobs.

New Deal (Oxfordshire)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people in Oxfordshire have moved into permanent jobs through the New Deal programme; and what is the average cost to public funds of each new permanent job created. [95996]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* In the Oxfordshire Unit of Delivery, 303 young people have gained sustained employment through the New Deal for Young People since it started in April 1998 to the end of August 1999. In addition, 70 people aged 25+ have gained sustained employment through the New Deal in the Oxfordshire Unit of Delivery.
At the end of August 1999, 365 young people were participating in the New Deal. A further 255 people aged 25+ were participating in the New Deal for Long-term Unemployed People aged 25 and over.

As at June 1999, for the group of people who entered New Deal in Oxfordshire in the period July to September 1998, the average cost to public funds of each job found was £2,088.

New Deal (North-east)

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many 18 to 24 year olds have started New Deal in *(a)* the area covered by the Government Office for the North East and *(b)* Tynemouth broken down by (i) employer, (ii) full time education, (iii) the voluntary sector (iv) the environment task force and (v) other. [96859]

Ms Jowell: In the period ending August 1999, the table shows the number of young people who have jointed New Deal and the number who have gone on to join an option for *(a)* Employment Service Northern region, and *(b)* Tynemouth constituency.

	Northern region	*Tynemouth*
Starts to New Deal	25,800	640
Starts to Employer option	1,940	28
Starts to FTET	6,020	160
Starts to VS	1,580	36
Starts to ETF	1,710	14
Leavers from Gateway to unsubsidisedjobs	4,380	136

Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

GCSE Achievement

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local education authorities have asked for a variation of the national target

for GCSE achievement in 2002; what variations have been agreed; and what reasons for variation have been accepted in each case. [95897]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* The national targets for GCSE achievement in 2002 cover all pupils in England. It is not open to local education authorities to seek to vary the national targets.

Labour and Social Affairs Council

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the outcome of the Labour and Social Affairs Council held in Luxembourg on 22 October; and if he will make a statement. [96775]

Ms Jowell: I represented the UK at this meeting of the Council.

The Council was dominated by discussion of the employment package. Discussion will continue during November, with a final version of the package due for submission to the Helsinki European Council on 11–12 December.

The Council welcomed the Commission's proposals for amendments to the Employment Guidelines for 2000. On Commission proposals for Council recommendations on the implementation of member states' employment policies, the UK led a discussion which sought to ensure support for the principle of recommendations. The majority of the Council members endorsed this approach.

The Council heard a progress report from the Presidency on a draft Council decision to establish the Employment Committee. The Presidency also reported on the negotiations for a Community programme to promote the social integration of refugees.

The Council agreed conclusions welcoming a new action programme to promote equality between men and women and conclusions noting a Presidency report on member states' implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Commission Communication on a strategy for modernising social protection was warmly welcomed by most member states.

Mature Students

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the number of mature students at universities and other higher education establishments for the years *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1999; and if he will make a statement. [97370]

Mr. Wicks: Information for 1999–2000 is not yet available. The most recent data are shown in the table.

Mature[1] Home Domiciled Higher Education Students[2] in Great Britain

	1989–90	*1994–95*	*1998–99*
Full-time	234,755	441,011	430,978
Part-time	338,823	505,619	630,603
Total	573,583	946,630	1,061,581

[1] Postgraduates aged 25 or over, and undergraduates aged 21 or over.
[2] Higher education and further education establishments including the Open University.

Educational Maintenance Allowance Pilots

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total amount top-sliced from the SSA discretionary awards budget to pay for the Educational Maintenance Allowance Pilots in 1999–2000. [97548]

Mr. Wicks: None. The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Pilots have been funded entirely from new money provided for this purpose. The transfer from local education authority discretionary awards is being used to contribute to the costs of the access funds and specific help for residential students and for childcare. These new arrangements will mean more spending on students than would have been the case had the discretionary awards scheme continued.

EMAs have the potential to make a real difference to young people's life chances. Early indications are that they are having a positive impact in the pilot areas.

Bolton Institute of Higher Education

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to make a decision concerning the application of Bolton Institute of Higher Education to become a university. [97362]

Mr. Wicks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to be able to announce a decision before the end of the year.

"Voices" Magazine

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many copies of "Voices" magazine have been published; how many have been distributed and to whom; and what was the cost of publishing this magazine. [97311]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* 20,000 copies of the "Voices" magazine were published. The publishing and production costs were £59,976.80. The cost of the publication was shared in part with other Government Departments.

Every copy of "Voices" has been distributed. Copies were sent to approximately 2,000 women who attended the Listening to women roadshows, as promised to them, the Women's National Commission, all GP's surgeries and Primary Health Care Directors and NHS and Local Authority Chief Executives, Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, media contacts and individual requests from members of the public, universities, local authority services etc. Copies were sent to the Parliamentary Library, Cabinet Ministers, women MPs and Peers, The Welsh Assembly, The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Women's Forum, The Northern Ireland Executive, Women MEPs, three EU Commissioners, Civil Service Departments and appropriate branch heads. There is a significant demand for "Voices" from a wide range of sources, so a re-print of 10,000 copies has been ordered to meet these requests. This will cost a further £17,439. Copies of "Voices" will be distributed to all public libraries shortly. Copies have been sent to the UN, the European Commission and overseas contacts.

The Key points, Government actions and contact numbers in "Voices" were also published in a summary leaflet. Approximately 250,000 leaflets were printed at a cost of £12,927 and these are being distributed through retail outlets (Bhs and Mothercare) and GP surgeries to ensure we reached as many women as possible.

Student Identification Numbers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made in developing a unique student identification number. [97488]

Mr. Wicks: The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Lord Dearing, recommended in July 1997 that works be undertaken over the medium term on the creation of a framework for data about lifelong learning, using a "unique student record number".

Since then a number of important developments have taken place—notably the introduction this term of a national system of "unique pupil numbers" to facilitate the statistical tracking of pupils through the school system. The potential for extending the use of the unique pupil number (or some alternative) beyond school needs to be reviewed, not only in relation to the Dearing recommendation, but also in the light of developments in post 16 education and training policy as a whole.

The contribution of a unique student record number to the creation of a framework of data on lifelong learning (the real aim of the Dearing recommendation rather than the unique student record number in itself) would however take a great many years to materialise, because the number could be used only to reference learning episodes occurring from that point on. As an interim measure, we are therefore carrying out a technical evaluation of the possibility of accumulating data on individuals' learning experience by means of so-called "fuzzy matching" based on (for example) names and dates of birth. This approach too has its limits, given the increasing incidence of name changes with age. The aim in the first instance is to cover learning up to age 21, with a view subsequently to extending that up to age 25.

Careers Advice

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice he has circulated to local authorities and contractors about the relative priority in careers advice to be given to young people studying for qualifications *(a)* at Level 3, *(b)* at Level 2 and *(c)* at or below Foundation Level. [97486]

Mr. Wicks: Careers services are required by contract to ensure that all young people get the careers information and guidance at whatever level they study. They must do this in close partnership with schools and colleges in order to provide the right help at the right time for each individual student. The Secretary of State has asked careers services to focus their resources on those most at risk of dropping out or under-achieving, to ensure that they remain in learning after they have left school.

Nurses

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance Her Majesty's Government have given to universities which employ nurses on the relationship between pay awards for nurses employed by universities and those employed by the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [97671]

Mr. Wicks: Neither my Department nor the Higher Education Funding Council for England has issued guidance to higher education institutions on the pay of nurses. The terms and conditions of nurses employed by universities and colleges are matters for them as the employer.

Educational Exchanges

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the development of educational and youth international exchanges. [97484]

Mr. Wicks: The UK fully participates in European Union education programmes including SOCRATES and LEONARDO which enable exchange opportunities for teachers, lecturers, pupils, students and young people in vocational training. Both programmes have recently been renegotiated and expanded.

The European Commission has recently published proposals for a new youth programme to develop the exchange programmes currently funded under Youth for Europe and the European Voluntary Service for Young People.

The Government fund the Central Bureau for International Education and Training and the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers to organise educational exchanges. Both organisations are modernising their programmes in the light of the Green Paper, "Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change", which proposed a major new programme of international development opportunities for teachers. Pilots of the new programme are currently operating. We intend to announce plans for the new programmes next year.

National Academic Recognition and Information Centre

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the *(a)* current operations and *(b)* use made of the National Academic Recognition and Information Centre. [97487]

Mr. Wicks: The UK National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC) is one of a number of such centres established under the SOCRATES EC education programme. It also forms part of a wider group of European Centres established through the Council of Europe. Both these networks promote the mobility of students by providing them and institutions with information and advice on the comparability of academic qualifications from other countries: UK NARIC handle over 26,500 such inquiries per year. The UK NARIC's responsibilities also include researching and evaluating foreign qualifications, compiling a newsletter to universities and colleges and others, and organising and participating in meetings, seminars and conferences to disseminate information.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current net yield of tuition fees at higher education institutions in England. [97656]

Mr. Wicks: Figures for the current net yield of tuition fees at the higher education institutions in England are not yet available.

The higher education funding plans assumed that institutions in England will receive private income from home and EU students starting full-time undergraduate courses for 1998–99 as follows: £130 million in 1998–99; an extra £105 million in 1999–2000; and, compared with 1998–99, an extra £203 million in 2000–01. Over this period, the higher education sector will retain all the income from student contributions to fees and receive extra public funding on top. Figures for 2001–02 will be announced later.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements his Department has made to ensure that higher education institutions do not breach the prohibition on top-up fees. [97657]

Mr. Wicks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has imposed a condition on the grant to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for 1999–2000 under section 26(4) of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998. Any institution which charges, or announces its intention to charge, top-up fees to students who have been assessed as eligible to be considered for fee support could incur financial penalties. With the assistance of HEFCE, the Department has been monitoring the charges made by individual institutions to ensure that top-up fees are not levied.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students are wholly or partly exempted from paying tuition fees; what proportion that represents of the student body; and what is the range of that proportion between the various higher education institutions. [97655]

Mr. Wicks: The first data on local education authority financial support, for the student tuition fees introduced in 1998–99, will be available in April 2000, from returns collected retrospectively from local education authorities in England and Wales.

These data will show the number of locally-domiciled students who, are income assessment, have had their fees paid (i) in part; and (ii) in full by their local education authority, and the number of students who paid their own tuition fees in full. It will not be possible to identify payments made to individual institutions from these data.

Student Support (Fraud)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on measures designed to curtail fraud in the student support system. [97489]

Mr. Wicks: There are a number of well established measures to combat fraud in the student support system. All applications for higher education places submitted through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) are scrutinised by HUNTER, a specialist computer system which checks for suspect applications. The UCAS Verification Unit—which received £50,000 in grant aid from my Department this year—investigates individual cases arousing suspicion. It also shares information with local education authorities (LEAs), which assess eligibility for support; the Student Loans Company (SLC), which is responsible for most payments; and higher education institutions, which confirm student attendance on their courses. The LEAs and SLC make their own complementary checks including scrutiny of supporting documentary evidence, and the SLC carries out its own investigations using the HUNTER system.

A-Levels

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies he has undertaken into the relative values of grades awarded at GCE A Level. [97490]

Mr. Wicks: No specific studies of the relative value of GCE A level grades have been carried out either by the Department or the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. However, QCA regularly monitors A levels to ensure consistency in grading standards across different syllabuses, subjects and awarding bodies, and over time, as part of its normal evaluation programme.

TREASURY

Departmental Asset Sales

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish *(a)* a list of assets sold by his Department and their value, item by item, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99 and *(b)* an estimate of the value of asset sales planned to be made in the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [95092]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Married Couple's Allowance

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the cost of restoring the married couple's allowance to the pre-1992 Budget level at today's prices. [96865]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1991–92 the married couple's allowance for couples under 65 was £1,720 and reduced the taxpayer's taxable income. If this allowance were increased in line with inflation to 1999–2000 and still given as a deduction from income, the cost would be around £4 billion. This estimate is based on the 1997–98 survey of personal incomes, projected to 1999–2000 consistent with the March 1999 Budget forecast.

Climate Change Levy

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has assessed the impact on the UK brick industry of the climate change levy; and if he will make a statement. [96893]

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy on the *(a)* food processing and manufacturing industry, *(b)* chemical industry and *(c)* aluminium industry. [96958]

Mr. Timms: It is not possible to say at this stage what the effect of the climate change levy will be on individual industries. That will depend on the final design of the levy, including the rates set for the energy intensive sectors covered by the current negotiations with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons electrolysis of aluminium is to be excluded from the climate change levy. [96965]

Mr. Timms: The exemption for electricity used for electrolysis in certain applications including primary smelting of aluminium, announced by the former Economic Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt), is designed to mirror the exemption for gas and coal used in chemical reactions.

Excise Duty (Beer)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with EU member states and the Commission regarding the harmonisation of excise duty on beer. [97543]

Mr. Timms: None.

Energy Discounts

Mr. Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research has been conducted into the impact on less energy-intensive firms and sectors of granting significant discounts to energy-intensive operations; and how this has affected the levels and extent of such discounts. [97379]

Mr. Timms: The Government aim to design the climate change levy in a way which maximises environmental effectiveness while safeguarding competitiveness. The Government have received a number of representations about the effects of the climate change levy and the rates that might apply to different sectors, which we will be considering carefully when finalising the design of the levy. The Chancellor has indicated that he intends to say more about the design of the climate change levy in the 9 November Pre-Budget Report.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Asset Sales

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the assets sold by her Department and their value, item by item, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99; and if she will estimate the value of asset sales planned to be made in 1999–00 and 2000–01. [96900]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *39–40*. In addition, the following information is also available for:

	Item sold	*Year of sale*	*Sale proceeds (£000)*
Cabinet Office	Government Buildings, Leatherhead Road, Chessington	1997–98	13,670
	Crown Buildings, Alencon Link, Basingstoke	1999–2000	1,300
Civil Service College	Parcel of land—Sunningdale Park, Ascot	1997–98	22
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency	Metropolitan Telephone Service related assets	1996–97	[1]4,000

[1] Assets were transferred as part of a deal under the Private Finance Initiative, payment for the assets will be made over a period of 10 years from the date of sale.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what methods of depreciation her Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97041]

Marjorie Mowlam: In the preparation of the 1999–2000 Cabinet Office resource account, depreciation will be provided on a straight line basis calculated to write off the valuation of fixed assets over their estimated useful lives. The method of depreciation is in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual, the requirements of which are underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15 'Tangible Fixed Assets', issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

Severance Pay

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what is the current entitlement to severance pay for Secretaries of State who have resigned; and what was the amount spent on such severance pay in the last 12 months, broken down by ministry. [97390]

Marjorie Mowlam: Under the terms of section 4 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, Ministers are entitled to receive a severance payment of one quarter of their final annual ministerial salary when they leave office. This applies as long as the individual is under the age of 65 and is not appointed to another relevant Ministerial or other paid office within three weeks of their leaving office. The Prime Minister and the Lord Chancellor are not included in this scheme.

The amounts spent on Ministerial severance pay by each department since 27 October 1998 are as follows:

Department	*Amount (£)*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	13,907.75
Cabinet Office	11,787.25
Culture, Media and Sport	6,329.75
Defence	25,991.75

Department	Amount (£)
Education and Employment	6,329.75
Environment, Transport and the Regions	12,659.50
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	8,339.75
Health	11,787.25
HM Treasury	11,208
Trade and Industry	11,300.25
Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland	20,237.50
Welsh Office	17,630
Total	157,508.50

HEALTH

Health Services (Merseyside and Sefton)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce health inequalities *(a)* on Merseyside and *(b)* in Sefton. [94651]

Yvette Cooper: The Merseyside Health Action Zone is already developing and implementing plans to reduce health inequalities across the whole of Merseyside, including Sefton.

Health Action Zones are the main plank of the Government's strategy to reduce health inequalities by targeting resources at areas which have greatest health needs related to poverty and social exclusion. Extra resources are being made available to the Merseyside HAZ partnership to tackle this agenda.

The Merseyside HAZ programme is designed to integrate with other Government initiatives to tackle social exclusion by focusing on marginalised and hard to reach groups. Major themes include employment and Merseyside wide healthy schools initiatives. In its first year the HAZ will fund work to assess the 'Health Impact' of the Merseyside Transport Plan and local Housing Investment Programmes.

During 1999–2000 the HAZ is to make £1.6 million available as a match against European Objective 1 Urban Moneys, supporting regeneration initiatives in some of the most deprived areas of Merseyside.

Blood

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the number of cord blood units held in each of the cord blood banks in the UK; [94420]

(2) what is the target for the number of units of cord blood to be held by each cord blood bank; what progress is being made towards achieving the target; [94422]

(3) what is the present level of stocks held by the cord blood service at Edgware; and if he will make a statement. [94820]

Mr. Denham: The actual and target number of units of cord blood held in each of the National Blood Service banks is:

Bank	Donations	Targets
London	3,159	10,000
Newcastle	500	1,000
Bristol	749	1,500
Total	4,408	12,500

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the percentage of cord blood stocks held at each cord blood bank, broken down by ethnic group. [94419]

Mr. Denham: The percentage of cord blood stocks by ethnic group held by the National Blood Service is as follows:

European Caucasoid—67 per cent.
Non-European Caucasoid—21 per cent.
African and Afro-Caribbean—9 per cent.
Oriental—1.5 per cent.
Others—1.5 per cent.

The majority of non-caucasoid donations are stored at the London cord blood bank based in Edgware.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health over the last three years, to which countries overseas cord blood has been made available from the UK. [94418]

Mr. Denham: Over the last three years, cord blood donations have been made available by the National Blood Service in England to Australia, Hong Kong, France, Spain, United States of America, Italy and Portugal.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in each of the last three years received cord blood donation; for what conditions; and with what survival rate. [94417]

Mr. Denham: Since 1996, six children have received cord blood transplants in the United Kingdom. One cord blood unit was supplied from the Newcastle Cord Blood Bank, three from the United States of America, one from Italy, and one from Germany. Five out of the six units were provided for malignant diseases, of which 4 were for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia and one for myeloproliferative disease. One transplant was for a genetic disorder, Falconi's anaemia.

Of the five children who received transplants for malignant disease, two died of infection, and one has relapsed. The fourth is too early to assess, but the fifth is doing well one year after transplantation. The patient with Falconi's anaemia is also doing well 11 months after the transplant.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available for each of the last three years, for the development of cord blood transplantation services *(a)* throughout the UK and *(b)* at Edgware. [94416]

Mr. Denham: Approximately £4 million has been spent by the National Blood Service on the development of cord blood banking in England. Approximately £3.5 million of this investment has been in the London cord blood bank.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's strategy towards developing cord blood transplantation services. [94421]

Mr. Denham: The use of cord blood in the treatment of various diseases in children, including leukaemia, is a new development. This high technology treatment raises questions about clinical benefits, bioethics and availability within the National Health Service. We have therefore asked the four UK blood services to address these issues and to make joint recommendations for the future collection and storage of cord blood in the UK. We are currently considering their report.

Bone Marrow Donor

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the percentage broken down by ethnic group of bone marrow donors. [94423]

Mr. Denham: There are two bone marrow donor registers: the British Bone Marrow Register and The Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust. Both are working actively to encourage donor recruitment from black and ethnic minority groups through publicity campaigns. The Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust has around 300,000 donors on its register and holds a breakdown of the percentage of donors by ethnic groups on its register which is shown in the table. The British Bone Marrow Register (BBMR) holds 100,000 donors but does not hold a similar breakdown by ethnic groups.

Donor figures: ethnic minority groups on the Anthony Nolan register as of 30 September 1999 (by percentage)

Group	*Percentage*
African	0.4
African-Caribbean	2.2
Asian	1.2
Eastern European	0.1
Hispanic	0.02
Jewish	1.9
Mediterranean	0.7
Middle eastern	0.03
Oriental	0.1
Other (usually mixed race)	1.6
Unknown[1]	14.8
N. European White	77
Total of Non-white	8.8

[1] Mostly typed before ANBMT asked about ethnic origin

Water Fluoridation

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the EU countries which fluoridise their water supplies; and if he will make a statement. [94687]

Yvette Cooper: Within the European Union, there are water fluoridation schemes where natural fluoride content has been artificially adjusted up to the optimum level of 1 part per million in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and Spain.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* scientific and *(b)* laboratory studies which provide evidence that fluoridation of water supplies reduces tooth decay in humans. [94688]

Yvette Cooper: The evidence for the safety and efficacy of fluoridation of water supplies is to be found in the very extensive, relevant published scientific literature. Recent reviews, which contain lists or references, include:

WHO Technical Report Series 846: *Fluorides and oral health* (World Health Organisation, Geneva, 1994). ISBN 92 4 120846 5;

One in a Million: water fluoridation and dental public health (Public Health Alliance and British Fluoridation Society, 1995). ISBN 1 873514 11 5;

Review of Fluoride Benefits and Risks (Report of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on fluoride of the committee to co-ordinate environmental health and related programs. Public Health Service. Department of Health and Social Services, USA. February 1991).

We have commissioned a review which is being undertaken by the University of York Centre for Reviews and Dissemination to assess the evidence on the efficacy and safety of population wide drinking water fluoridation strategies to prevent caries.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *361*, on water fluoridation, how he will measure the significant risks referred to; and what proposals his Department has to monitor such risks post-fluoridation. [93916]

Yvette Cooper: The review will assess the scientific evidence from which it has been widely accepted that the fluoridation of water at one part per million is a safe and effective means of reducing tooth decay. We cannot pre-judge its outcome, but if significant risks were identified we would need to review our policy before any further fluoridation schemes were considered.

Oncologists

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many clinical and medical oncologists there are in each EU country; and if he will make a statement. [94193]

Yvette Cooper: Information about the number of clinical and medical oncologists in each European Union country is not available centrally. Information about the number of clinical and medical oncologists in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland. The latest available information about the number of clinical and medical oncologists in England is shown in the table.

Hospital medical staff in clinical and medical oncology specialties in England on 30 September 1998

	Whole-time equivalent
Clinical oncology (radiotherapy)	600
Medical oncology	260
Total	860

Notes

Figures rounded to the nearest 10

Source:

Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census, 30 September 1998

Departmental Publications

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his Department's spending on official publications since May 1997. [93686]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Contaminated Polio Vaccine

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *548*, what assessment he has made of the implications of contamination of polio vaccine in the United Kingdom with simian virus 40 between 1955 and 1963, for the development of cancers in humans. [93663]

Yvette Cooper: SV40 (simian vacuolating virus 40) is a virus found in some species of monkeys. The polio virus in inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) used in the 1950s and early 1960s was grown on monkey kidneys, some of which have been shown to be potentially contaminated with SV40 virus. Concern about the possible impact of SV40 on the human population was raised in the early 1960s and precautions to prevent contamination were introduced internationally in 1962, shortly after the virus was identified. SV40 has been shown to be oncogenic in certain animals and has been found in several human tumours. It is not known whether SV40 causes the human tumours or whether it is just coincidentally present in the tumours. However, research studies in people who received potentially SV40 contaminated IPV have found no increase in cancers when compared with people who did not receive potentially contaminated IPV.

The National Institute of Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC) has tested stored polio vaccine using the most sensitive available modern molecular biological techniques to check whether the precautions introduced in the 1960s were effective. All the polio vaccines used since 1980 have been shown to be free of SV40 and all vaccines used since 1962 for which samples could be located are also free. Samples of IPV from the 1950s to the 1960s were not available. Serological studies have been conducted with the Public Health Laboratory Service which showed no evidence of increased antibody to SV40 in people receiving polio vaccine. In all ages of the people tested, about 5 per cent. had SV40 virus antibodies, suggesting that the virus may have been present in humans for a very long time and hence these antibodies are unlikely to have come from SV40 contaminated polio vaccine.

This issue has been considered by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, the Government's independent expert advisory committee, which has expressed reassurance as a result of the NIBSC work. NIBSC's study has been published (Biologicals (1999), vol. 27, pps 1–10) copies of which are available in the Library.

National Cancer Forum

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the National Cancer Forum has met; at each meeting what new best practice and joint working projects were established; and if he will make a statement. [94065]

Yvette Cooper: The National Cancer Forum (NCF) was established to support the implementation of the Calman/Hine cancer blueprint and to advise on specialised issues related to cancer. The Forum has met three times on 19 February 1998, 16 September 1998 and on 25 October 1999 at which I discussed the Government's priorities for cancer. The NCF has identified the need to secure quality and consistency in cancer services through ongoing implementation of Calman/Hine, the development of national standards and performance indicators and the publication of evidence-based guidance as key priorities. Members of the NCF have been working with the Department to take specific pieces of work forward. A number of NCF members were present at the Downing Street cancer summit held in May 1999 where these priorities were ratified and a work programme and action plan agreed. In view of the new agenda set for cancer it will be necessary to reconstitute the NCF to address a revised work programme.

Cloning

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement regarding the required qualifications and experience for membership of the Chief Medical Officer's expert advisory group on the HFEA/HGAG recommendations on cloning. [93879]

Yvette Cooper: Individuals were invited to serve on the expert group in the light of their personal expertise in appropriate areas of science and medicine including genetics, cell biology, reproductive biology, veterinary medicine, haematology, surgery and molecular biology. Three additional members were appointed for their expertise in ethics and law.

Microwave Transmissions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies his Department has commissioned into the non-thermal effects of microwave transmissions associated with *(a)* telecommunication masts, *(b)* mobile telephones and *(c)* cordless telephones; and if he will make a statement. [93913]

Yvette Cooper: The Department's Radiation Protection Research Programme has funded a study of the effect of mobile phone frequency radiation (microwaves) on memory and reaction times in humans. The work was carried out at Bristol University and the results were published on 8 April in the International Journal of Radiation Biology. A further study on the effects of radiofrequency radiation on behaviour patterns is being carried out at Chemical and Biological Defence Porton Down. This work is not yet complete.

In addition, the National Radiological Protection Board, which is sponsored by the Department, is carrying out biological investigations into possible behavioural effects of mobile phone radiation.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research the Government have

(a) commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into any correlation between cattle-associated occupations and bovine tuberculosis in people; and if the recent increase in bovine tuberculosis in cattle has caused an increase in bovine tuberculosis in the local human population. [94537]

Yvette Cooper: There is no evidence at present that the increase in bovine tuberculosis in cattle has led to an increase in bovine tuberculosis in the local human population.

The number of isolates of *M.bovis* from human cases of bovine tuberculosis in England and Wales has varied from 22 to 37 per year between 1993 and 1998 with no trend to increase or decrease. The numbers of cases arising in those regions of England and Wales with the greatest increase in bovine tuberculosis in cattle (South West, Wales and West Midlands) have remained low and have also varied from year to year with no increasing or decreasing trend.

If the risk of tuberculosis due to *M.bovis* infection was increasing in the population generally as a result of bovine tuberculosis in cattle, an increase in tuberculosis notifications in young children (the group least likely to have other explanations for tuberculous infection) might be expected in the part of the country most affected by bovine tuberculosis. The number of cases of tuberculosis notified in children (less than 15 years of age) in the South West Region has remained low between 1993 and 1998. At the request of the Department of Health, the Public Health Laboratory Service has looked at existing data to investigate whether there is a correlation between cattle-associated occupations and bovine tuberculosis. The Department has not commissioned additional research.

Meningitis Vaccine

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many students who had requested meningitis vaccine had not received it before returning to college this autumn; and what action is being taken to make it available to them as quickly as practicable. [94722]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* Meningococcal A + C vaccine was recommended for higher education students starting their first year at university or college. It was recommended that first year students receive the vaccine either before the start of term or when they begin at university/college. Around 550,000 doses of meningococcal A & C vaccine were issued from the end of August, throughout September and into October. This quantity is well in excess of the target population.

The Department wrote direct to all universities and colleges asking them to ensure that arrangements were in place for the vaccine to be offered to all first year students who had not been immunised. The Department also contacted direct those health centres and general practitioner practices which serve universities and colleges to see how best the vaccine could be delivered to them. The Health Education Authority sent packs of information, including special leaflets, to all universities and colleges so that they could target those first year students who had not been immunised. Publicity was also provided through student-focused media. Local implementation of the immunisation programme is managed by the local immunisation co-ordinator.

Equal Opportunities

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if an action plan for increasing the representation of women in public life has been *(a)* prepared by his Department and *(b)* published since November 1998. [94849]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 682.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the numbers of patients who left the NHS waiting list for acute surgery because they opted to pay for an operation using private funds in each of the last three years. [95332]

Yvette Cooper: The Information requested is not available centrally.

Fertility Treatment

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the issuing of national guidance for fertility treatment available on the NHS. [95165]

Yvette Cooper: The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists intend to publish their third, and final, set of evidence based clinical guidelines on infertility in January 2000.

Pathology Services

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for further allocation of resources to improve pathology services from the modernisation fund. [95708]

Mr. Denham: Ministers are considering the allocation process and amounts for future years. An announcement about 2000–2001 will be made in due course.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the process and what criteria are used to determine successful bids for resources to improve pathology services under the modernisation fund. [95694]

Mr. Denham: The process and criteria for the 1999–2000 Pathology Modernisation Fund are set out in Health Service Circular 1999–170. The criteria for judging the probity of bids for capital investment purposes were taken from the NHS Executive guidance issued in accordance with the Capital Investment Manual.

MRSA

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of recorded MRSA patients in NHS hospitals in each of the last five years; how many and what proportion of NHS hospitals recorded MRSA outbreaks; and how many and what proportion of NHS hospitals have full-time staff dedicated to the prevention and control of MRSA and related infections. [95661]

Yvette Cooper: MRSA infection is not a notifiable disease and therefore the total number of patients in National Health Service hospitals who have MRSA is not recorded centrally. The Public Health Laboratory Service compiles aggregate data on numbers of incidents of MRSA which are reported by trusts. The available data on the incidents of MRSA are given in the table. The number of NHS acute trusts recording MRSA outbreaks are not collected centrally. All NHS acute trusts should have an infection control team which has primary responsibility for, and reports to the chief executive on, all aspects of surveillance, prevention and control of infection, including MRSA. The structure of infection control teams is a matter for local management discretion. Details of the number of whole time equivalent staff dedicated to the prevention and control of MRSA and related infections are not available centrally.

Incidents[1] of MRSA in England and Wales 1994–1998

Year	*Total*
1994	1,064
1995	1,616
1996	2,107
1997	[2]2,364
1998	[3]1,597

[1] An incident is three or more patients infected or colonised by the same strain of MRSA in the same month from the same hospital
[2] The figures for 1997 and 1998 reflect the new NHS
[3] The criteria for submission of isolates for specialist tests were revised in December 1997

Public Health White Paper

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have for the implementation of the proposals contained in the Public Health White Paper. [95706]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* We are working across Government and at regional and local levels to implement the wide range of initiatives in the White Paper "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" published on 6 July 1999. We are committed to the achievement of the targets for reducing deaths in the priority areas of cancer, coronary heart disease and stroke, accidents and mental illness and to the establishment of local targets for reducing health inequalities.

With the White Paper, we issued a circular to health authorities and local authorities setting out the follow-up action they should take together. We shall be publishing at the end of the year a technical supplement which will identify key data sources and aid the local selection and monitoring of targets.

Cancer Diagnosis

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions have taken place between his Department and representatives of general practitioners regarding guidelines on the levels of clinical suspicion in cancer diagnosis; and when those discussions took place. [95112]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* In May 1999, the Department brought together a Cancer Referral Steering Group, including cancer specialists and general practitioners, including representatives from the Royal College of General Practitioners to lead work to develop cancer referral guidelines to help general practitioners identify more easily those patients with symptoms that could be cancer and require urgent investigation. There will be wide ranging consultation on the draft guidelines, nationally and locally, in which GPs and others will be invited to take part.

Heart Disease

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to encourage employers to provide low-fat meals for employees in order to reduce heart disease. [94931]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* We have funded, through our food and nutrition contract with the Health Education Authority, a variety of projects aimed at providing healthy eating choices in the workplace. The Heartbeat Award for example, encourages workplace caterers to work with local health professionals to help reduce the incidence of coronary heart disease by providing people with access to healthier food choices. Furthermore, in July this year, a video resource called "Tipping the Balance" was launched to show workplace caterers how they can make small but significant changes to their customers' favourite dishes without affecting their popularity. We are also funding a workplace catering pack, which is currently being redeveloped and will become available after pre testing in spring next year. The aim of these measures is to improve the balance of the ingredients used in dishes, and to encourage people to eat less fat and more cereals, fruit and vegetables.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects that the working party set up to assess the state of research into the health implications of mobile telephone usage will report; and if he will make a statement. [95720]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones, chaired by Sir William Stewart FRS, FRSE, is expected to report in spring 2000. The group is currently considering the possible health effects from the use of mobile phones, base stations and transmitters and is conducting a rigorous assessment of existing research. A call for evidence has recently been placed in national newspapers and scientific journals.

Human Infant Organs

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what inquiries he is making into the retention of human infant organs by Alder Hey Hospital. [96255]

Yvette Cooper: In view of the concerns raised about the removal and retention of organs (at post-mortem), I have asked the Chief Medical Officer to conduct an investigation. This investigation will look at what has happened not only at the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital (Alder Hey) but in the country generally and at the implications for the National Health Service. Any recommendations relating to Coronial practice emerging from the Chief Medical Officer's investigation, the Bristol Inquiry, or other local reviews will receive full consideration.

Nurse Recruitment

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new nurses have been recruited during each of the past five years; what is the target of new nursing recruits for the next 12 months; what initiatives are being pursued to attract more young people into nursing; and what is the cost of these initiatives. [96251]

Mr. Denham: The number of pre-registration diploma and degree recruits into nursing and midwifery training in England over the last five years are:

Year	*Number*
1994–95	11,463
1995–96	12,364
1996–97	13,967
1997–98	15,522

The latest estimate of outturn for 1998–99 is 17,221.

The number of pre-registration diploma and degree nursing and midwifery recruits planned for 1999–2000 is 19,332.

We are supporting a number of initiatives to attract more people into nursing, including a national competition run in secondary schools (£100,000), the national nurse recruitment campaign (£5 million), NHS Careers (£500,000), widening access to nurse training and the Positively Diverse initiative. In addition, the Government have implemented in full the Nurse Pay Review Body recommendations for a 12 percent. pay rise for newly qualified staff.

Nut Allergies

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action his Department has taken and what plans he has to ensure children from atopic families avoid early sensitisation to nut products and that parents and carers are aware of the risk of sensitisation; [96442]

(2) what information his Department issues concerning anaphylaxis and contact between young children and nut products. [96439]

Yvette Cooper: The Department of Health asked the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT), an advisory committee comprised of independent experts, to make recommendations to help reduce the prevalence of peanut allergy. The report was published in June 1998 and includes advice to parents of children from atopic families and pregnant mothers from atopic families about sensitisation to peanut products. Copies are available in the Library. In addition, a leaflet "Peanut Allergy—the Facts" which summarises the Committee's advice was sent to all GP surgeries in England. Copies of it are also available in the Library.

Medical Treatment

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the British Medical Association Guidelines and Code of Practice on Advance Statements about Medical Treatment; and if he will make a statement. [96517]

Yvette Cooper: We have considered these Guidelines and Code of Practice carefully. They aim to promote clarity in the area of advance statements to enable their validity and applicability to be decided on a case by case basis.

Clinical Priority

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he will take to ensure that access to hospital treatment is based on clinical priority. [96648]

Mr. Denham: We have made it clear that clinical priority must be the main determinant for when patients are seen in outpatient clinics or when they are admitted to hospital.

Disabled Children

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were excluded from *(a)* local council and *(b)* other leisure and play schemes on the grounds of medical conditions which are not classed as disabilities in each of the last five years. [96443]

Ms Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The information required is not collected centrally.

Cancer Services

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list his Department's expenditure on cancer services for the last five years; [96239]

(2) how much extra money he plans to allocate to cancer services; and if this will be provided solely from general taxation; [96241]

(3) what plans he has to increase the extent of service provision for multi-disciplinary care for *(a)* breast, *(b)* ovarian, *(c)* lung, *(d)* prostate and *(e)* colorectal cancers throughout the UK. [96240]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* It is estimated that over 6 per cent. of total Government expenditure on the National Health Service is spent on cancer services. Since 1997, we have provided an additional £70 million into improving breast, colorectal, lung and outpatient cancer services. We will build on this record of achievement. An extra £80 million from the NHS modernisation fund will be invested in cancer services over the next two years. This will support the implementation of the two week outpatient wait for all urgent cancer referrals and work to further improve consistency and equity of access to cancer services through investment in workforce and equipment.

£93 million is being spent on cancer equipment from the New Opportunities Fund from the National Lottery and a further £23 million is also being set aside from the New Opportunities Fund for palliative care and prevention initiatives.

Professor Mike Richards will spearhead the drive on cancer within the Department and work with professional groups and the voluntary sector outside to modernise cancer services from prevention through to treatment and care.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the remit of Professor Michael Richards in relation to Government policy on cancer treatment; and to whom he reports. [96238]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* On 25 October, we announced a package of measures to up the pace of change and deliver faster and more wide ranging improvement to cancer services. This included, for the first time, the appointment of a National Cancer Director. Reporting to Ministers, Professor Mike Richards will spearhead our concerted drive on cancer. He will work in partnership with doctors, nurses, general practitioners, other health professionals and the voluntary sector to improve prevention and modernise cancer services to help ensure equitable access to high quality cancer care. He will work within the Department of Health with executive responsibility.

Smoking

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the figures on the incidence of smoking between 1996 and 1998. [96646]

Yvette Cooper: Figures on adult smoking prevalence in 1996 were published in "Living in Britain—results from the 1996 General Household Survey", in March 1998. Key figures from the 1998 General Household Survey, including smoking prevalence among adults aged 16 and over, are due to be published on 1 December 1999 by the Office for National Statistics.

Figures on regular smoking by young people aged 11 to 15 years in England in 1998 were published by ONS on 14 October 1999 in "Smoking, drinking and drug use among young teenagers in 1998". This report also contained data from earlier surveys in the series, including the survey carried out in 1996.

Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

CJD

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with his Scottish counterparts about CJD victims. [96627]

Yvette Cooper: None. We remain committed to ensuring that all patients who are suffering from CJD are provided with appropriate and timely health and social care.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94986]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its PSA, and the measures of success it will use in the Output and Performance Analyses published in March this year. A full list of the targets and target dates for Agencies can be found annually in the "Next Steps Report", and for executive NDPBs in the "Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies Report", or in the appropriate annual report and accounts. The Departmental Annual Report contains further details of the Department's objectives and targets.

These high-level targets are supported at operational level by numerous targets to ensure delivery by individual units. Listing these operational targets would be inappropriate and disproportionate in terms of resources.

Tube Feeding

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will issue guidance on the withholding or withdrawal of tube feeding and hydration from patients who are not terminally ill, following the BMA's own guidance on this issue. [97251]

Ms Stuart: We have no plans to publish specific guidance on withholding or withdrawing medical treatment from patients.

NHS Hearing Tests (Worthing)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the action he proposes to take to cut the delays in providing NHS hearing tests to the over-85s in Worthing; and what the average delay is in non-emergency cases. [97222]

Mr. Hutton: Worthing and Southlands Hospitals National Health Service Trust has recently reviewed the skill mix within the Audiology Department to enable increased clinic availability and have recruited two additional qualified audiologists.

These measures, plus £6,000 of additional funding, will enable the Trust to operate weekend clinics and bring down waiting times for all patients.

Long-term Care

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many copies of the report of the Centre for Policy on Aging Standards for Care Homes he has made available to consultees; and if he will make a statement. [97155]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 November 1999]:* 5,000 copies of the Department's consultation document "Fit for the Future?" were printed. About 1,500 were sent to a wide range of organisations and individuals, representing users, carers, regulators and providers and other interested bodies, for consultation nationally. The others were available for anyone who wished to have a copy. I understand that about 600 copies are still in stock. "Fit for the Future?" is available on the internet to anyone who wishes to see it.

We will carefully consider all the comments we receive before finalising the standards and the timetable for their implementation.

School Nurses

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans for the School Nursing Service. [97437]

Mr. Hutton: School nurses are often ideally placed to help children, young people and their parents find the support and services they need to make the most of their time at school. This role is more fully described in "Saving Lives—Our Healthier Nation" and "Making a Difference: strengthening the nursing, midwifery and health visiting contribution to health and health care"—copies are available in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will give a substantive reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire dated 5 July regarding the outcome of his Department's review of direct payments for care. [97292]

Mr. Hutton: I replied to the right hon. Member on 3 November.

Student Grants (Nurses)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on delays in the payment of grants to student nurses. [97492]

Mr. Denham: We accept that there have been delays in the payment of bursaries to some National Health Service funded student nurses and are aware that a minority of students have not yet received bursaries to which they are entitled.

Around 24,000 bursary applications have now been processed and all students who are entitled will have received a payment by 10 November.

Generic Drugs

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the *(a)* actual and *(b)* percentage increase in the price of generic drugs to the NHS over the last 12 months. [97293]

Mr. Denham: An index of Drug Tariff prices for the top 100 generic drugs dispensed in 1998 (by net ingredient cost) for this year is as follows:

Month	*Index*
January	100.0
April	103.4
May	106.5
June	112.0
July	117.0
August	124.4
September	126.2
October	130.7
November	132.9

It has been possible to provide only 11 months' data.

Thyroxin

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the change in the drug tariff to the NHS for 1,000 thyroxin 100 mcg in actual and percentage terms between November 1998 and November 1999. [97291]

Mr. Denham: The price in the November 1998 Drug Tariff for a 1,000 pack of thyroxine 100 microgramme tablets was £8.85; the November 1999 Drug Tariff price was £60.16. This is an increase of £51.31 or 580 per cent.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to reduce deaths from prostate cancer. [97669]

Ms Stuart: The White Paper "Saving Lives—Our Healthier Nation"—published in July—proposed a target to reduce the death rate from cancer in those under 75 by 20 per cent. by 2010. The Government encourage early detection of prostate cancer and have already announced that, by December 2000, all urgent general practitioner referrals of suspected cases should be seen by a consultant within two weeks of referral. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will commission outcomes guidance on prostate cancer within the next two years.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Prices

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial help he is giving to dairy farmers to compensate for the low price of milk; and if he will make a statement. [96608]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The EU dairy regime provides substantial support to UK dairy farmers but EU rules do not allow member states to provide support to compensate for the low price of milk. However, as part of the aid package announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 20 September, the deferral of the proposed £7 per animal cattle passport charges until April 2002, at the earliest, will help dairy farmers.

Quarantine

Mr. Amess: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which recommendations of the Kennedy report on quarantine the Government have not accepted. [97051]

Ms Quin: The Pet Travel Scheme pilot is essentially the scheme recommended by Professor Kennedy, except that cats and dogs originating in rabies-free islands (other than assistance dogs from Australasia) will only be allowed to enter the UK once the full scheme is in operation.

The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens considered Professor Kennedy's recommendations on exotic diseases other than rabies. The Committee agreed that treatment should be given to all imported pet cats and dogs for a tapeworm (*Echinococcus multilocularis*) and ticks. The ACDP advised that treatment be given not less than 24 hours and not more than 48 hours before embarkation to the UK. Professor Kennedy recommended that treatment be given no more than 24 hours before embarkation. This would represent a modification of Professor Kennedy's Recommendations 1, 2, 35 and 36.

As regards microchips, animals will be allowed to enter the UK with any microchip fitted. Where a microchip is fitted that does not comply with the ISO standards recommended by Professor Kennedy, the owner of the animal will have to provide a reader. Thus Recommendations 11 and 22 have been accepted but with modification.

In the Pet Travel Scheme, authorised transport operators will carry out pre-entry checks on pets. Thus, Professor Kennedy's Recommendations 16–18 and 28 will be implemented in a different way from that proposed.

Professor Kennedy recommended that the Minister examine further the need for a database of health certificates (Recommendations 13 and 14). It has been concluded that a database is not necessary for the operation of the pilot scheme.

The recommendations that Professor Kennedy made in respect of species other than pet cats and dogs will be considered later (Recommendations 30 to 33 inclusive). Consideration of Recommendations 9 and 38 (research projects) will also be taken forward in due course.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what date has been selected for the operation of the pilot scheme of quarantine reform. [97052]

Ms Quin: An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which countries are currently deemed rabies-free by his Department in respect of quarantine regulations. [95636]

Ms Quin: The present quarantine regulations apply to animals from all countries entering the UK, except those from the Irish Republic, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

By April 2000, the Pet Travel Scheme pilot scheme will be introduced. Eligibility will be confined to cats and dogs entering the UK from western European countries (including UK and Irish animals returning from these countries) that meet the Scheme conditions. Assistance dogs from Australia and New Zealand that meet the Scheme conditions will also be eligible.

Not all countries in western Europe are considered rabies free, but Professor Kennedy found that provided dogs and cats were microchipped, vaccinated and blood tested, the risk of importing rabies in animals from these countries was comparable to that under the existing policy of quarantine.

The Office International des Epizooties (OIE), the international veterinary organisation sets down criteria for countries to be regarded as rabies free, but it does not publish a list of those countries.

My Department is currently considering the status of other islands, whose authorities claim to meet the OIE criteria for rabies freedom, for participation in the full Pet Travel Scheme which will come into effect by April 2001. Australia and New Zealand are known to meet these criteria.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish his proposals for the future of the hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme. [96920]

Ms Quin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on 29 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *1044*.

Bovine TB

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials and *(b)* external contractors were engaged in the execution of the bovine TB study area trials under Professor Bourne on (i) 1 October 1998, (ii) 1 January 1999, (iii) 1 June 1999 and (iv) 1 October 1999. [96066]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The trials are being carried out by the Ministry's Wildlife Unit. Wildlife Unit staff numbers were (i) 74, (ii) 75, (iii) 80 and (iv) 126.

The numbers of external contractors were (i) none, (ii) one, (iii) two and (iv) three.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress in developing a vaccine against TB for *(a)* cattle and *(b)* badgers. [96193]

Ms Quin: The Government are funding expenditure of about £1.4 million a year on vaccine development. The main thrust of the programme in its first five-year phase is to identify vaccine candidates. The work is being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency and the Institute of Animal Health, drawing on work carried out internationally and in related fields, such as human vaccines, as appropriate. Emerging findings will be published as and when appropriate. At this stage the main development work could apply equally to both a cattle or a badger vaccine.

Common Agricultural Policy

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government are taking to reform the CAP. [95759]

Ms Quin: The Government pressed for a radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy throughout the Agenda 2000 negotiations. While the final agreement reached at Berlin in March this year did not go as far as we would have liked, the reforms did achieve very significant changes, bringing closer the UK objective of securing a competitive and sustainable agricultural industry with a stronger market orientation.

We will pursue opportunities created by anticipated market pressures, the reviews contained within the Agenda 2000 agreement and the existing commitment to reform the sugar regime by 2001 to push for the reform process started at Berlin to be completed.

Cattle Movement Service

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the British Cattle Movement Service; and if he will make a statement. [95455]

Ms Quin: The British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) has been in operation for just over a year. A review of the current arrangements for administering it, and alternatives, would be premature. The BCMS has recently published a Standards of Service Statement against which its performance will be continually assessed.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on Government policy relating to consumer choice in the purchase of vitamin and mineral supplements. [95872]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* Consumers are currently able to choose from a wide variety of vitamin and mineral supplements sold under food law. The Government have no plans to limit access to supplements that are lawfully sold under food law unless this is necessary for the protection of public health.

Pig Meat Imports

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from which countries the UK imports pig meat and pig meat products; what steps he has taken to ensure that the standards of welfare and traceability are comparable to those in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [95719]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The major overseas suppliers of pigmeat and pigmeat products to the UK market are Denmark, the Netherlands, the Irish Republic, Germany and France. While we have no legal authority to impose British standards of welfare and traceability on those suppliers, my right hon. Friend the Minister will be meeting a number of retail groups to assess progress in their commitment given to him that all their own label fresh pork and certain processed products such as bacon would come from stall and tether and MBM free production systems.

Also, as part of the strategy to assist the pig production sector, a verification officer has been appointed. His remit is to work with industry bodies to identify cases where product is being sold at retail or catering level which misleads the consumer into believing it contains pork of British origin when in fact it is imported.

BSE Inquiry

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the BSE inquiry report will be completed; and if the report will be made public. [95666]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister announced on 25 May 1999, *Official Report*, columns *110–11*, that the Inquiry had requested an extension of the time needed to complete their task and the Government had agreed that the Report should be delivered by 31 March 2000. I expect the Report to be delivered on that date. It will subsequently be published.

Food Imports

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total value of food products, imported into the United Kingdom in 1998 from countries outside the EU, which were produced to hygiene standards less stringent that those required of British farmers. [96265]

Ms Quin: Imports of food products from third countries must meet the same, or equivalent, standards of hygiene as food products produced in the European Union.

Meat Inspection

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives are being pursued by his Department to ensure that all EU member states implement the Community legislation on meat inspection to the same level. [96261]

Ms Quin: It is for the European Commission to ensure that member states fully implement European legislation, including meat inspection legislation. However, where we receive evidence that other member states are failing to comply with Community obligations, we will of course pass such evidence on to the Commission for investigation. In this connection, we have passed copies of our own survey of meat inspection charges in other member states, and of the recently published Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) report on meat inspection charges and other enforcement costs to the Commission. In so doing, we have urged the Commission to carry out a thorough investigation of the way in which the EU Charges Directive has been implemented in other member states and of the level of inspection charges in each country. We are, in particular, pressing the Commission to investigate the allegations of subsidy in Italy and non-collection of charges in Spain outlined in the MLC report.

Nuts

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to improve the labelling of produce containing *(a)* nuts and *(b)* nut oils. [96531]

Ms Quin: We have been pressing the European Commission to bring forward proposals to change EC food labelling legislation to make the labelling of nuts and nut products, and other substances recognised as causing hypersensitivity, compulsory in all cases when their presence is intentional. We will continue to press for action, and hope to see positive developments on this towards the end of the year.

In the meantime, we will continue to encourage the voluntary provision of such information on food labels where this is appropriate.

Shropshire Farmers

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much Government funding was given to Shropshire farmers in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [96476]

Ms Quin: Under the Common Agricultural Policy, a total of just over £43 million was paid to Shropshire farmers in 1997. This included both EU and nationally funded contributions. However, they will also have received a share of funding under market support measures, which benefit farming generally but which cannot be calculated at a county level.

French Animal Feed

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on what date officials in his Department were informed that human and animal waste, and meat and bonemeal were being used in French animal feed; and if he will make a statement; [96016]

(2) on what date he was informed that human and animal waste, and meat and bonemeal were being used in French animal feed; and if he will make a statement. [96017]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* A Reuters article, reported by several newspapers, alleging contamination of French animal feed with waste was seen by officials in my Department on 10 June 1999. Subsequent contact between the UK and the Commission was pursued by officials in the Joint Food Safety and Standards Group, the Department of Health and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. MAFF officials also contacted their French counterparts and received assurances on 15 June that these were isolated incidents and remedial action had been taken.

Following new media reports on 16 August, the Commission then raised the issue with the French Government and initiated an investigation. At the same time, Ministers were advised by the Joint Food Safety and Standards Group that there was no immediate risk to health and no special action necessary.

Supermarket Prices

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for further discussions with supermarket chains on pricing policy; and what progress he has made. [96683]

Ms Quin: Pricing decisions in respect of produce at retail level are matters for the commercial judgment of the retailers involved. The Competition Commission are currently investigating competition in the grocery retailing sector which will include relationships with suppliers including farmers. However, some of the actions arising from the work of the Food Chain Group should help to increase understanding throughout the food chain of the competitive pressures faced by individual sectors and how decisions and actions by one part of the chain may impact upon another.

Over-30-month Rule

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Government expect to lift the over-30-month rule. [96749]

Ms Quin: The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has identified criteria against which the controls on beef over-30-months of age can be reviewed in the future, and began to address these at its meeting on 18 March 1999. The Committee recognised that the issue would require careful study and would almost certainly need to be considered over several meetings.

At its meeting on 20 September the Committee noted that it was expected that updated epidemiological analyses of the BSE epidemic would be available for its meeting on 29 November. The Committee agreed to postpone further consideration of the over-30-month rule until that meeting so that it could take these analyses into account.

In the light of the Committee's conclusions, and after consultation with all interested parties, the Government will consider what changes to the over-30-month rule, if any, could be made, consistent with the continued protection of public health. Any changes to the rule will need to be agreed with the European Commission and member states as it forms part of the Florence Agreement on the lifting of the beef export ban.

WALES

Objective 1

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Lottery moneys which are used as a constituent part of projects attracting Objective 1 European funding will be termed public or private expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [97534]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The National Assembly would not have to provide public expenditure cover for Lottery match funding. Lottery moneys are not Exchequer funding. Lottery funding counts as public expenditure within the Total Managed Expenditure of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 November 1999

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Estate (Running Costs)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what are the estimated running costs for Portcullis House and the running costs in the latest year for which figures are available for 7 Millbank and Norman Shaw North and South. [96726]

Sir Sydney Chapman *[holding answer 3 November 1999]:* The annual running costs for Portcullis House are estimated to be some £3.6 million. This includes the cost of utilities, rates, cleaning and maintenance. Comparable figures for other buildings on the parliamentary estate for 1998–99 are; 7 Millbank—£2.5 million and Norman Shaw North and South—£1.3 million. The hon. Member will wish to note that Norman Shaw South is overdue for a major refurbishment, and therefore running costs have been somewhat curtailed in the last few years.

Westminster Hall

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what is the cost of refurbishing the Grand Committee Room for the Westminster Hall sittings. [97520]

Sir Sydney Chapman: The total cost of the refurbishment is £882,000.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, from what budget heading costs for Scottish Grand Committee meetings will be allocated. [97587]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* Costs associated with meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee at Westminster are met from the general administrative budgets of the House of Commons. Additional costs associated with meetings in Scotland are met from the budget for standing committees' travel and subsistence.

Library

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what arrangements have been made between the Library and the British Museum for the keeping of those parts of the Library's older book stock which are of antiquarian interest but which are seldom needed by hon. Members. [97838]

Mr. Allan: The Library has a substantial number of books which were acquired when it was re-stocked after the fire of 1834. These volumes, often in fine bindings, are not often used by hon. Members but are of potential interest to scholars. I have been informed that the Librarian has signed an agreement with the Director of the British Museum which will mean that these books will be transferred on a long term loan to the care of the Museum, where they will be housed in the King's Library. This room was vacated when the British Library moved to its new St. Pancras building. The loan will mean that the books will be on display in a fine setting and that the Museum will be able to provide access by scholars, both its own staff and others. If any volumes are needed by hon. Members, the Library will be able to retrieve them, but it will not be responsible for the continuing care of the books and will gain the use of valuable storage space. The books will be transferred when the refurbishment of the King's Library is complete, which is expected to be in 2003.

Lords Amendments

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council on how many occasions, in each parliamentary session since 1992, Lords amendments to Bills which have been the subject of a motion moved in this House to disagree have been *(a)* rejected and *(b)* accepted by this House. [97820]

Mrs. Beckett: There appear to be no examples to category *(b)* in the period in question. The table gives details, according to the records, of Lords amendments disagreed to by this House since Session 1992–93. All were subject to motions to disagree except for one case in 1993–94, where a motion to agree with a Lords amendment to the Sunday Trading Bill was negatived on division.

Date	*Bill*	*Number of amendments disagreed to*
Session 1992–93		
7 June 1993	Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill	3
14 June 1993	Housing and Urban Development Bill (changed to Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Bill)	1
19 July 1993	Education Bill	13
3 November 1993	Railways Bill	3
Session 1993–94		
21 April 1994	Sunday Trading Bill	1 (Motion to agree negatived)
28 June 1994	Coal Industry Bill	3
19 October 1994	Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill	18
20 October 1994	Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill	12
1 November 1994	Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill	2
Session 1994–95		
17 July 1995	Criminal Appeal Bill	2

Date	Bill	Number of amendments disagreed to
Session 1995–96		
15 July 1996	Asylum and Immigration Bill	3
17 July 1996	Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill	1
22 July 1996	Housing Bill	3
Session 1996–97		
18 February 1997	Firearms (Amendment) Bill	6
Session 1997–98		
24 July 1997	Education (Schools) Bill	1
30 July 1997	Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill	8
20 April 1998	Bank of England Bill	1
9 June 1998	European Communities (Amendment) Bill	1
13 July 1998	Teaching and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*	1
15 July 1998	School Standards and Framework Bill	20
28 July 1998	National Minimum Wage Bill	4
27 October 1998	European Parliamentary Elections Bill	4
11 November 1998	Scotland Bill	11
Session 1998–99 (to 5 November 1999)		
22 June 1999	Tax Credits Bill	3
21 July 1999	Access to Justice Bill *[Lords]*	1
21 July 1999	Employment Relations Bill	1
3 November 1999	Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill	12
4 November 1999	Greater London Authority Bill	3

HOME DEPARTMENT

Schengen Accord

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the mechanism by which Her Majesty's Government can rescind participation in Schengen. [97527]

Mrs. Roche: The Protocol integrating the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union, annexed to the Treaties by the Treaty of Amsterdam, makes provision in Articles 4 and 5 for the participation of the United Kingdom in the Schengen acquis and in its development. Once the United Kingdom has chosen to participate, to that extent the normal arrangements of the Treaties apply, and it would not be possible to rescind participation. The United Kingdom is otherwise not bound by the Schengen acquis. My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, submitted on 26 May 1999, an application on behalf of the United Kingdom to participate in certain provisions of the Schengen acquis, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department from which elements of Schengen Information System data, in accordance with Section 13 of the Commission Opinion on the request by the UK to take part in certain provisions of the Schengen acquis, the Commission recommends the UK remain excluded from access. [97522]

Mrs. Roche: The Commission Opinion refers to the need to study the feasibility of limiting the United Kingdom's access to data held under Article 96 of the Schengen Implementing Convention. This reflects the terms of the United Kingdom to participate in certain provisions of the Schengen acquis; we requested that we should be allowed not to enter or receive such data, which is related to the refusal of admission to third country nationals at the external frontier. This is because we are not seeking to participate in the external frontier control provisions of the Schengen acquis.

Asylum and Immigration

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for the latest period for which figures are available the number of people entering the UK from non-EU countries as visitors with permission to stay for up to six months; the proportion of these not permitted to pass immediately through passport control but subject to interview and the proportion of those interviewed refused entry. [97445]

Mrs. Roche: All non-European Economic Area (EEA) passengers seeking entry as visitors are subject to interview to determine their admissibility under the immigration rules. In the 12 months from July 1998 to June 1999, some 8.2 million non-EEA nationals were granted leave to enter as visitors for up to six months. Information on persons seeking entry as visitors who were subject to further examination is available only for 13 of the largest ports. At these ports, 23,500 non-EEA visitors were subject to further examination in the 12-month period and of these, 68 per cent. (16,100) were refused leave to enter.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average waiting time at *(a)* Heathrow and *(b)* Gatwick airports of people wishing to enter the UK as visitors who are not permitted to pass immediately through passport control but are subject to interview. [97444]

Mrs. Roche: The information requested is not available.

The length of time involved in assessing a passenger's eligibility for entry varies considerably depending on the particular situation and on factors such as the availability of interpreters and sponsors, which are outside the control of the Immigration Officer.

Every effort is made to deal with each case at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure that the Immigration and Nationality Directorate operates in a non-discriminatory way; and what monitoring is carried out of the Directorate's *(a)* operations and *(b)* statistics on immigration case decisions. [97530]

Mrs. Roche: Staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) are required by the Immigration Rules to perform their duties without regard to the race, colour or religion of persons seeking to enter or remain in the United Kingdom. Staff dealing with applications are trained in racial and cultural awareness. All IND staff are in the process of receiving training in discrimination issues and equal opportunities. IND investigates all complaints by members of the public against IND staff, including complaints of racial and other unfair discrimination. The independent Complaints Audit Committee, appointed by my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, monitors the effectiveness of the procedures, and reports to him annually. Copies of these Reports are placed in the Library. The number of complaints of discrimination since 1995 are given in the table:

	Racial discrimination	*Other unfair discrimination*	*Total*	*Substantiated*
1995	40	1	41	1
1996	31	6	37	1
1997	41	8	49	0
1998	38	11	49	0
1999[1]	21	4	25	4

[1] Provisional figures to end of September

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of staff employed in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate who deal with individual casework excluding administrative staff, indicating the proportions from *(a)* black and *(b)* ethnic minority communities. [97529]

Mrs. Roche: Since January 1999, the majority of casework has been undertaken by staff in the Integrated Casework Directorate (ICD). Most casework decisions in the ICD are taken by Administrative Officers (AOs) or Executive Officers (EOs) with staff in other grades providing either management, quality control, or administrative support for the caseworking function. The data requested are as follows:

Grade	*Number of staff*[1]	*Ethnic Origin*[2] *Black (%)*	*Asian (%)*	*Other (%)*
AA	386	15.28	33.05	1.23
AO	516	11.43	23.31	0.67
EO	460	9.11	16.35	1.63
HEO	204	2.76	5.52	0.60
SEO	37	—	—	—
Grade 7	9	—	—	—
Grade 6		—	—	—
SCS		—	—	—

[1] Figures exclude Support Grade Band staff

[2] The percentages shown relate to the number of staff in each grade whose ethnic origin is known

Domestic Violence

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to police authorities in respect of the concession in immigration law on the one year rule in respect of domestic violence. [97372]

Mrs. Roche: The Secretary to the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Standing Committee on the Disclosure of Convictions was notified at the same time as the concession was announced so that all Chief Police Officers could, in turn, be advised that the concession was operational. This is now being taken forward through ACPO procedures. ACPO's Standing Committee had previously agreed that immigration caseworkers could make written inquiries of the criminal records office of individual police headquarters about cautions for domestic violence. Referral forms and procedures were agreed with ACPO.

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to Women's Aid and other agencies regarding the concession in immigration law on the one year rule in respect of domestic violence. [97373]

Mrs. Roche: No specific notification was sent to Women's Aid but Southall Black Sisters, who were involved in discussions about the proposed concession, were sent details when it was announced. Information about the concession can be found in the Immigration Directorate Instructions. These are available on the Home Office Internet website and a copy is also available in the Library.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women died as a result of domestic violence in each of the last three years for which figures were available; and if he will make a statement. [97450]

Mr. Boateng: Details of homicides held centrally do not enable those cases preceded by domestic violence to be separately identified.

The table shows the number of currently (as at 31 July 1998) recorded homicides in England and Wales, 1995 to 1997, where the victim was the current or former spouse, cohabitant or lover of the principal suspect:

Currently recorded homicides where the victim was the current or former spouse, cohabitant or lover of the principal suspect, England and Wales, 1995 to 1997

	Male victims	*Female victims*
1995	38	92
1996	26	92
1997	34	105

A Home Office Research, Development and Statistics project has looked at domestic homicides in West Yorkshire between 1994 and 1997, based on data provided by the police. The aim of this study included an exploration of the links between domestic violence histories of offenders and domestic homicides. A draft report is currently in preparation; it is anticipated that a final report will be produced next year.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are currently

detained under the Immigration Acts in *(a)* detention centres, *(b)* Prison Service establishments and *(c)* other accommodation. [97576]

Mrs. Roche: The latest available information, relating to the snapshot of all persons detained solely under Immigration Act powers, by location, on 30 September 1999, is given in the table.

Persons recorded as being in detention [1] in the United Kingdom solely under Immigration Act powers as at 30 September 1999, by place of detention

Location	*Total detainees*
Immigration detention centres [2]	
Campsfield House	174
Dover Harbour	27
Harmondsworth	90
Harwich	2
Heathrow's Queens building	15
Longport	5
Manchester airport	7
Tinsley House	142
Other immigration centres	1
Prison establishments	
Aberdeen	8
Bedford	3
Belmarsh	10
Birmingham	2
Blakenhurst	5
Brixton	3
Canterbury	15
Dorchester	2
Durham	2
Elmley	5
Feltham	5
Gloucester	2
Haslar	157
High Down	16
Holloway	16
Holme House	2
Lancaster Farms	2
Leeds	5
Liverpool	4
Longriggend	18
Manchester	7
Norwich	2
Pentonville	10
Preston	2
Rochester	191
Swansea	2
Wandsworth	5
Winchester	3
Woodhill	2
Wormwood Scrubs	7
Other prison establishments	9
Total	985

[1] Figures exclude persons detained in police cells (other than at Dover Harbour)

[2] Figures include the use of police cells at Dover Harbour

Freedom of Information

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the draft Freedom of Information Bill to ensure that non-departmental public bodies are required to disclose information explaining the bases of their decisions to allocate financial resources. [97365]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The draft Freedom of Information Bill provides that all public authorities, including non-departmental public bodies, are required to disclose information they hold, subject to the conditions and exemptions set out in the draft Bill. Even where information is exempted information, the changes to the draft Bill which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson), *Official Report*, 21 October 1999, column *624*, will mean that a public authority will have to consider the public interest in disclosing information when considering whether to exercise the discretionary authority to disclose.

Probation Service (Computers)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to seek compensation from the suppliers of software to the Probation Service. [97550]

Mr. Boateng: The suppliers of the case management software to the Probation Service are contractually obliged to deliver a Year 2000 compliant version of that software by the end of November. Although there was some delay, earlier this year, in progress against plan in the development of that software, the suppliers are now back on schedule to achieve this.

British Board of Film Classification

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 local authorities have *(a)* refused to allow the screening of films cleared by the British Board of Film Classification and *(b)* permitted the screening of films deemed unsuitable for screening by the British Board of Film Classification. [97593]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Under the cinema licensing regime provided by the Cinemas Act 1985, local authorities have the power to determine whether particular films may be shown in cinemas in their area. I understand that local authorities generally require cinemas to abide by the classification certificate issued by the British Board of Film Classification and that decisions not to do so are rare. Records of their decisions are not held centrally.

Prison Goods (Sales)

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the textile, clothing and footwear produced within HM Prisons is sold at normal commercial prices for goods of comparable quality; and what measures are in place to ensure that this is done. [97959]

Mr. Boateng: Clothing, textiles and footwear are sold at normal commercial prices. Products are costed using an industry-recognised costing software package. Allowance is made for the lower productivity levels achieved in prison workshops. These prices are compared with commercially available statistics to check that they are in line with normal wholesale prices.

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the annual sales turnover of textile, clothing and footwear products produced within HM Prisons broken down between those consumed

by *(a)* the Prison Service, *(b)* other Government Departments, *(c)* local authorities and *(d)* the private sector in each of the last five years. [97958]

Mr. Boateng: The breakdown of sales for textiles and footwear products from prison workshops for the year 1989–99 is given in the table. Figures are not available for previous years due to a change in reporting procedures.

Sales of textiles and footwear from prison workshops 1998–99	£
Textiles	
Prison Service	12,647,801
Other Government Departments/Agencies	650,143
Local Authorities	2,700
Private Sector	129,800
Total	13,430,444
Footwear	
Prison Service	2,025,977
Private Sector	52,610
Total	2,078,587

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of HM Prisons are engaged in the production of textiles, clothing and footwear; and what was the annual turnover of such products in each establishment in the latest year for which information is available. [97957]

Mr. Boateng: There are 64 prison establishments involved in textiles and four in footwear. Turnover for textiles and footwear products for 1998–99 are given in the table.

1998–99

Establishment	*Sales value (£)*
Textiles	
Acklington	385,385
Albany	162,067
Ashwell	49,442
Birmingham	626,282
Blundeston	117,878
Bristol	253,607
Bullingdon	18,643
Bullwood Hall	2,574
Camp Hill	86,156
Cardiff	100,090
Castington	72,878
Channings Wood	79,561
Cookham Wood	53,730
Dartmoor	202,293
Dorchester	2,762
Drake Hall	12,761
Durham	335,269
Exeter	75
Featherstone	1,779,980
Ford	67,414
Foston Hall	52,765
Full Sutton	1,032,129
Garth	235,405
Gartree	263,755
Guys Marsh	45,155
Haverigg	612,263
Hewell Grange	2,160
High Down	13,036
Highpoint	174,933
Hindley	7,035
Hull	119,316
Lancaster	295,611
Leeds	418,274
Lincoln	668,419
Lindholme	98,606
Littlehey	2,955
Liverpool	128,034
Low Newton	41,324
Maidstone	105,594
Moorland	60,193
New Hall	103,731
Norwich	10,859
Nottingham	99,072
Parkhurst	41,362
Pentonville	153,080
Preston	356,326
Risley	999
Shepton Mallet	59,898
Shrewsbury	380,343
Stafford	102,009
Standford Hill	75,005
Stocken	287,861
Stoke Heath	76,454
Styal	79,560
Swansea	18,707
Wakefield	836,243
Wandsworth	1,017,756
Wayland	132,481
Wealstun	372,665
Whatton	77,210
Whitemoor	2,251
Winchester	149,342
Wormwood Scrubs	22,403
Wymott	189,018
Total	13,430,444
Footwear	
Ashwell	770,131
Gartree	370,148
Liverpool	32,028
Sudbury	906,280
Total	2,078,587

Animal Sanctuaries

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to require operators of animal sanctuaries to be licensed. [97505]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is not Government policy at this time to seek to license the operators of animal sanctuaries, and there are no plans to change that. Animals in sanctuaries have the same protection against cruelty—afforded principally by the Protection of Animals Act 1911—as those in other privately run establishments. It is not considered that there is sufficient evidence of problems with sanctuaries across the country to warrant additional introduction of a statutory licensing regime.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to transfer the operation of anti-social behaviour orders to the County Court. [96380]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have no such plans.

Conveyancing (Electoral Register)

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on the speed of the home buying process of his proposal to restrict the commercial use of the electoral register. [97989]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, is currently considering the recommendation, by the Working Party on Electoral Procedures, that electors should have the option of deciding whether the details that they provide for electoral purposes should be made commercially available. He will take into account representations from organisations that offer credit for house purchase when doing so.

Jury Trials (Fraud)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to amend the right to trial by jury in fraud cases. [96386]

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to alter the right to trial by jury in fraud cases. [96389]

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to amend the right to trial by jury in fraud cases. [96382]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government are considering the responses to the consultation document "Juries in Serious Fraud Trials" which was issued last year. They are aiming to announce their conclusions shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Estate

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will *(a)* list the assets sold by his Department and their value, item by item, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99 and *(b)* estimate the asset sales planned for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [95808]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The information requested by the hon. Member is not available in the form requested.

Labelling (Dangerous Substances)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if regulations required by Commission Directive 97/64/EC (O.J. No. L315, 19.11.1997, p.13) regarding labelling of dangerous substances have been published in all EU countries; and if he will list those regulations together with their proposed implementation dates. [96454]

Dr. Howells: The Dangerous Substances and Preparations (Safety)(Consolidation)(Amendment) Regulations 1999, which implement Directive 97/64/EC—The Lamp Oils Directive, were laid before Parliament on 22 July 1999 and came into force on 13 August 1999.

It is for the European Commission to monitor the transposition of EU Directives across the Community and take appropriate action as necessary. The Commission publishes information on which Directives have been transposed on its CELEX database. This can be accessed on the Parliamentary intranet at the Library of the House.

Telecommunications

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if regulations required under EU Directive 97/66/EC concerning the processing of personal data in the telecommunications sector have been published in all EU member states; and if he will list those regulations together with their proposed implementation dates. [96455]

Ms Hewitt: As far as the Government are aware, the latest position regarding the implementation of Directive 97/66/EC, in full or in part by EU member states, is as follows:

Member State	*Legislation*	*Date of coming into force*
Austria	Telecommunications Act 1997 (reference BGBI. Nr. 100/1997).	1 August 1997
Belgium	Telecommunications Act 1991 of 21 March 1991 as amended on 31 December 1997, and by Royal Decrees of 22 June 1998 (voice telephony), 8 July 1999 (calling line identification) and 14 September 1999 (telephone directories).	[1] 1 January 1998
Denmark	Executive Order 581 of 6 July 1999.	[2] 1 September 1999
	Executive Order 580 of 24 July 1999.	1 August 1999
Finland	Regulation 565/1999 of 22 April 1999.	1 July 1999
France	The Telecommunications Act of 26 July 1996 (Loi 96/659), Loi 90/1170 and the Decree on Standard Clauses of 29 December 1990 (Loi 96/1175).	Dates not known
Germany	Telecommunications Act of 25 July 1996.	1 January 1998
	Telecommunications Carriers Data Protection Ordinance of 12 July 1996.	19 July 1996
Greece	Draft Bill issued.	Expected January 2000
Ireland	Draft regulations issued 17 September 1999.	Expected end March 2000
Italy	Decree number 171 of 13 May 1998.	18 June 1998
Luxembourg	No information is available.	—
Netherlands	Telecommunications Act of 5 November 1998 (Stb 610).	15 December 1998
Portugal	Law 69/98 of 28 October 1998.	24 October 1998
Spain	General Telecommunication Law (November 1998) of 24 April 1998	26 April 1998
	Royal Decree 1736/1998 of 31 July 1998.	6 September 1998
Sweden	Amendment to the Telecommunications Act (1999.578) and regulations (1999.572).	1 July 1999
United Kingdom	The Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) (Direct Marketing) Regulations 1998 (S.I.3170/1998).	1 May 1999
	The Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations 1999 (S.I. 2093/1999).	[3] 1 March 2000

[1] Dates for Royal Decrees not known
[2] 1 December 1999 for some provisions
[3] 16 August 1999 for some provisions

Postal Services

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if regulations required under EU Directive 97/67/EC regarding postal services have been published in all EU member states; and if he will list those regulations together with their proposed implementation dates. [96451]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Postal Services Regulations 1999 (1999 No. 2107) laid before Parliament on 27 July 1999 implement the EU Postal Services Directive (97/67/EC) in the United Kingdom to the extent that it was not already covered by existing legislation and procedures. It came into force on 1 September.

It is for the European Commission to monitor the transposition of EU Directives across the Community and take appropriate action as necessary. The Commission publishes information on which Directives have been transposed on its CELEX database. This can be accessed on the Parliamentary intranet at the Library of the House.

Consumer Contracts

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if regulations required by EU Council Directive 93/13/EEC on unfair terms in consumer contracts (O.J. No. L95, 21.4.93, p.29) have been published in each EU country; and if he will list those regulations together with their proposed implementation dates. [96452]

Dr. Howells: The Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 (S.I. 1999 No. 2083) currently give effect to the Directive in the UK. These Regulations repealed and replaced 1994 Regulations (S.I. 1994 No. 3159) of the same name which came into force on 1 July 1994.

It is for the European Commission to monitor the transposition of EU Directives across the Community and take appropriate action as necessary. The Commission publishes information on which Directives have been transposed on its CELEX database. This can be accessed on the Parliamentary intranet at the Library of the House.

Objective 2 Areas

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to receive the European Commission's views on the proposed Objective 2 areas identified by the Government. [97546]

Mr. Caborn: We are currently in discussion with the Commission about the areas proposed for Objective 2 status for 2000 to 2006. We hope our proposed areas will be agreed by the end of the year.

APEC

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations he has made to the European Commission about the accelerated tariff liberalisation proposed by APEC; and if he will make a statement; [97151]

(2) what analysis he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of APEC's proposals in respect of accelerated tariff liberalisation of *(a)* chemicals, *(b)* energy products, *(c)* environmental products, *(d)* fish, *(e)* forest products, *(f)* gems and jewellery, *(g)* medical and scientific equipment and *(h)* toys. [97150]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 November 1999]:* APEC's proposals have been considered in detail at both national and Community level. We and all other member states have concluded that the APEC approach is selective and excludes sectors of importance to the EU. Our preference is to optimise market access within the framework of a comprehensive negotiation rather than accelerated sectoral liberalisation but we see no reason why sectoral agreements reached in the course of a comprehensive negotiation could not be implemented on a provisional basis prior to the formal conclusion of the New Round.

Climate Change Levy

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact on small and medium-sized enterprises in manufacturing of the introduction of the climate change levy; and if he will make a statement. [97640]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government believe that small and medium-sized enterprises also have a contribution to make towards reducing greenhouse emissions. Their initial proposals for the climate change levy reflect Lord Marshall's conclusion that a tax could help improve energy efficiency in small and medium-sized enterprises. The Government are seeking to design and implement the levy in a way that maximises the environmental benefits, while at the same time safeguarding the competitiveness of business of all sizes.

The Government have previously announced that £50 million per annum of the anticipated revenues from the levy will be used to provide energy efficiency advice for business, including small and medium-sized enterprises; as well as for increased support for renewable sources of energy and a "carbon trust" to develop low carbon technologies. This represents a step change from previous levels of funding. The Government are preparing proposals on the details of these arrangements and expect to make further announcements in due course.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will assess the effect the climate change levy will have on UK industrial competitiveness relative to that of *(a)* Belgium, *(b)* Norway and *(c)* Sweden; and if he will make a statement. [97860]

Ms Hewitt: The Government aim to design the climate change levy in a way which safeguards the international competitiveness of UK business.

The United Kingdom is not alone in having to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, nor in using economic instruments to do so. We expect that, on current projections, most OECD countries will have to introduce new measures of one kind or another in order to meet their Kyoto obligations. Governments are considering the policies and measures which they will need to deliver these commitments. This will take account of their various national circumstances, including existing fiscal regimes.

Compensation (Miners)

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for compensation from miners and miners' widows have been received to date for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema in (i) South Yorkshire, (ii) Yorkshire and (iii) the UK. [97283]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* As at 1 November 1999, the Government have received 87,336 claims from ex-miners and their families for respiratory diseases, of these 17,741 are from claimants in the Yorkshire area and 11,986 of these are from South Yorkshire. On VWF, the Government have received 50,755 claims from ex-miners and their families for vibration white finger, of these 12,783 are from claimants in the Yorkshire area and 10,299 of these are from South Yorkshire.

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the compensation that will be paid out over the next three years to miners and miners' widows for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema in (i) South Yorkshire, (ii) Yorkshire and (iii) the UK. [97282]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* The gross level of provision for the British Coal health liabilities assumed by the Department is:

Year	*£ million*
1999–2000	228.2
2000–01	490.3
2001–02	507.5

Due to a number of uncertainties—not least the number of claims likely to be received and the actual levels of compensation payable in individual cases—it is not possible to say how much will be required to meet the specific cost of miners' health claims for vibration white finger, and chronic bronchitis and emphysema, or to provide regional breakdowns.

The Government have, however, made clear that they will provide the funds necessary to meet the cost of legitimate claims.

Power Generation

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he introduced his stricter consents policy on energy sources for power generation; and when he will relax it. [97659]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The White Paper of October 1998 "Conclusions of The Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation and Government responses to fourth and fifth Reports of the Trade and Industry Committee" (Cm 4071) set out the Government's programme of reform in the electricity market and introduced a stricter policy on consents for gas-fired power stations to protect diversity and security of supply while the programme of reform was underway. As set out in the White Paper, the policy will be relaxed as soon as the Government conclude, on the basis of advice from the Director General of Electricity Supply on progress in addressing the competition issues, that the reform programme has been undertaken and the distortions in the electricity market removed. While this would not necessarily mean completing every aspect of the programme, the Government expect the reforms to be substantially complete across the picture before the consents policy is relaxed.

Arms Sales

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what mechanisms are in place to control and monitor advertisements on his Department's export website; and if he will make a statement on the advertisement placed on his Department's website by Nisam International of Esher listing stun guns among the equipment the firm was prepared to sell. [97482]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on 5 November 1999, *Official Report,* columns *335–36.*

The information included in the TradeUK entry for Nisam International Ltd. was provided by them on their application form. The reference to stun guns was removed by the TradeUK contractor on Friday 29 October 1999.

Gas Turbine Power Stations

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his decision on proposals by Burlington Resources (Irish Sea) Limited to build a combined-cycle gas turbine power station at Rhosgoch, Anglesey and by Kent Power Limited for the construction of a combined-cycle gas turbine power station on the Isle of Grain, Kent. [98158]

Mrs. Liddell: A direction has been given to Burlington Resources (Irish Sea) Limited under section 14(3) of the Energy Act 1976 in response to their notice under section 14(1) of that Act to prevent the building of a 560 MW combined cycle gas turbine power station to be fuelled by natural gas at Rhosgoch, Anglesey. Although the scheme would make significant heat supplies available, these would not be sufficient to demonstrate the efficiency levels for combined heat and power set out in the October 1998 White Paper. As well as the benefits which would result from the heat utilisation, the project offers other distinct environmental benefits. However, taken together, I do not consider that these are sufficient in this instance to outweigh the Government's concern over new gas-fired generation.

Consent, under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, has not been granted to Kent Power Limited (Enron Europe Ltd.) for the construction and operation of a 1,200 MW combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT) power station on the Isle of Grain, Kent. The company's application will be put on hold unless a case is put forward for a decision to be taken now.

I have taken these decisions in accordance with the policy set out in the White Paper entitled "Conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation and Government response to fourth and fifth Reports of the Trade and Industry Committee" (Cm 4071). I would be prepared to review these decisions, if requested, when the stricter consents policy announced in the White Paper is lifted.

Copies of the relevant Press Notice and letters are being placed in the Library of the House.

Coal Industry

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many persons are employed in the opencast coal industry in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England; what is the annual output of the industry in each country; and what percentage of the output of each is used by power stations. [R] [97677]

Mrs. Liddell: At the end of March 1999, employment in the opencast coal industry (including contractors), as declared to the Coal Authority, was 1,301 in Scotland and 1,882 in England. Opencast output in the year to 31 March 1999 was 6.4 million tonnes in Scotland and 7.0 million tonnes in England.

Information on the percentage of opencast output used in power stations is not readily available, but in 1998, 82 per cent. of all the coal produced in the United Kingdom by the five largest producers (one third of which was from opencast mining) was sold to power stations.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the total amount of coal imported to the UK in each of the past five years broken down by the nations from which the coal was imported. [R] [97680]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is shown in the table.

Volumes of coal imported into the United Kingdom

Thousand tonnes

Country of origin	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Australia	3,993	3,641	3,748	4,362	4,610
Belgium/Luxembourg	5	13	19	45	31
Canada	830	1,364	1,410	1,632	1,552
Colombia	2,963	2,686	2,824	2,810	3,820
France	15	—	23	9	—
Germany	191	132	151	86	25
Indonesia	153	64	27	84	24
Irish Republic	32	25	40	64	32
Italy	6	—	—	—	—
Netherlands[1]	225	104	253	183	157
Norway	—	2	6	102	120
People's Republic of China	77	77	30	78	132
Poland	1,961	1,274	850	700	950
Republic of South Africa	706	1,314	1,559	2,472	2,463
Russia	353	160	75	36	20
Spain	—	—	—	—	3
Sweden	—	10	33	—	—
United States of America	3,167	4,859	6,657	6,950	6,746
Venezuela	15	101	—	97	399
Vietnam	217	—	26	15	80
Other countries	133	70	68	131	67
Total all countries	15,041	15,895	17,799	19,856	21,233

[1] Includes some coal from outside the European Union routed through the Netherlands.

Source:

HM Customs and Excise as published in the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1999

Post Office

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he was consulted by the Post Office before its decision to appeal against the minimum wage ruling of the Employment Tribunal in the case of Sub-postmistress Elizabeth Bain of Tone, Inverness. [97863]

Mr. Alan Johnson: No. This is an operational matter, which is the responsibility of the Post Office Board and management.

HEALTH

Life Support

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation requiring that the withdrawal of food and fluid from persistent vegetative state patients be subject to a court order but otherwise following the Guideline of the British Medical Association on the withdrawal of treatment. [97097]

Ms Stuart: The courts have ruled that the withdrawal of artificial nutrition and hydration from a patient who is diagnosed in a persistent vegetative state should first be referred to a court for a decision. We have no plans to change the law in this respect.

We have no plans to introduce legislation requiring the guidelines of the British Medical Association on the Withholding and Withdrawal of Life-prolonging Medical Treatment to be followed.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there are any proposals to amend his Department's Departmental Expenditure Limit/running cost limit for 1999–2000. [98079]

Mr. Milburn: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates for Class II, Votes 1 and 2, the Department of Health Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000 will be increased by £109,984,000 from £40,345,035,000 to £40,455,019,000. The increase is the net effect of changes to Class II, Vote 1 (Hospital, community health, family health and related services, England) of £207,861,000 made up of £114,058,000 in respect of the take up of end year flexibility as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 July 1999, *Official Report,* column *393,* and £100,000,000 for the take up of departmental unallocated provision. In addition the following transfers will take place: £1,177,000 from Scotland (£47,000 for the High Security Infectious Diseases Unit and £1,130,000 for out of area treatments); £877,000 from Wales for out of area treatments and £7,464,000 from Class II, Vote 2 (Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England) (£662,000 for the Public Health Development Fund and £802,000 for regional professional development projects). The overall increase is partially offset by transfers of £8,364,000 to Wales, (£6,720,000 for high security psychiatric services and £1,644,000 for cross border adjustments for primary care groups); £4,800,000 to Class I, Vote 1 (Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services) for the King's College Hospital/United Medical and Dental School merger and £2,551,000 to Class II, Vote 2 (£2,500,000 for publicity on Meningitis C vaccine and £51,000 for cancer prevention).

The increase of £770,000 for Class II, Vote 2 (Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England) is the net

effect of transfers to Vote 1 of £4,913,000 (detailed above), £6,293,000 take-up of end year flexibility (mentioned above) for claims in respect of 1998–99 asylum seekers grant; £315,000 (£10,000 running costs) from Class IV, Vote 1 (Home Office administration, police, probation, immigration and other services, England and Wales) mainly for research; £500,000 (running costs) from Class IV, Vote 2 (Prisons, England and Wales) for prison health care services. The overall increase is partially offset by a transfer of £1,425,000 to Class I, Vote 1 (Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services) for a contribution towards the healthy schools initiative.

The amount required for non-voted supplementary credit approvals for personal social services (DoH/LACAP) in England is to be increased by £1,353,000 from £18,700,000 to £20,053,000 in respect of take up of end year flexibility entitlement as mentioned above.

The Department's gross running cost limit will be increased by £510,000 from £279,940,000 to £280,450,000 as detailed above.

All increases will either be offset by transfers to or from other Departmental Expenditure Limits (detailed above) or take-up of end year flexibility and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Waiting Lists (Worcester)

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were *(a)* the number of people waiting for 12 months or more for hospital treatment and *(b)* the total number of people waiting for hospital treatment, in May in each year from 1992 to 1999 in the Worcester Royal Infirmary Trust area. [96414]

Mr. Denham: The figures are for the Worcester Royal Infirmary National Health Service Trust for the end of March every year. Monthly collection of data only started in April 1998 so a time series for May was not possible. Trusts, as they are coded today, have only supplied data from June 1994. Prior to 1994–95 waiting list data were compiled from district health authorities returns. Therefore, there is no comparable data available for 1992 to 1994.

Worcester Royal Infirmary Trust

	Total	*Over 12 months*
March 1995	3,092	0
March 1996	3,230	0
March 1997	4,111	29
March 1998	5,047	191
March 1999	4,302	282

Clinical Suspicion

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for New Forest, West will receive a substantive response to his question of 19 October on discussions with the professions regarding levels of clinical suspicion. [97827]

Yvette Cooper: I replied to the hon. Member on 8 November.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Exports

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *738*, on how many occasions Her Majesty's Government have denied an arms export licence, notified EU partners and objected to another member state's stance on the appropriateness of export; what value of exports was involved; and what *(a)* values and *(b)* type of exports have been approved for export by another EU state despite United Kingdom notification. [97247]

Mr. Hain: The UK has issued 54 denial notifications under the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports between the adoption of the Code on 8 June 1998 and 31 October 1999.

Operative Provision 4 of the EU Code of Conduct states that "EU member states will keep such denials and consultations confidential and not use them for commercial advantage".

Mont Tremblant Conference

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* British and *(b)* European Communities delegations to the conference on federalism at Mont Tremblant, Quebec, in October; which members of either gave speeches; and if he will deposit texts of the speeches in the Library. [97523]

Mr. Battle: There were no formal delegations from the UK or the EC to the conference on federalism held recently at Mont Tremblant in Canada, at which participation was in a personal, rather than governmental capacity. A few, invited British officials attended but they did not make speeches. A British journalist and the Deputy Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament did speak, but these were statements of their own views. Information and documentation on the conference may be obtained from the organisers' website (address: www.ciff.on.ca).

Treaty Modifications

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will deposit in the Library a list of those areas which the Government have indicated a willingness to discuss as focus points for Treaty modification. [97531]

Mr. Vaz: The conclusions of the Cologne European Council set out the topics which are likely to be on the agenda for the IGC. A copy of the Cologne conclusions is in the Library.

Russian Federation

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which *(a)* regions and *(b)* cities there are European Commission representative offices in the Russian Federation outside of Moscow. [97405]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The European Commission does not have any representative offices outside Moscow in the Russian Federation.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which *(a)* regions and *(b)* cities there are diplomatic representations of European Union member states in the Russian Federation outside of Moscow, indicating which of these posts issue visas to Russian nationals to travel to (i) EU countries in the Schengen zone and (ii) EU countries outside the Schengen zone. [97400]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The following European Union member states have representations in the Russian Federation outside Moscow:

Austria—St. Petersburg (Honorary Consulate—no visa service)

Denmark—Kaliningrad, St. Petersburg

Finland—Karelyia, Murmansk, St. Petersburg

France—St. Petersburg

Germany—Novosibirsk, St. Petersburg, Saratov

Greece—Novorosisk, St. Petersburg

Italy—St. Petersburg

Netherlands—St. Petersburg

United Kingdom—Ekaterinburg, St. Petersburg.

Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Sweden are represented only in Moscow.

Those EU member states who are party to the Schengen agreement (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain) issue Schengen visas as well as visas solely for travel to their own country. None of the EU member states issue visas to Russians for travel to EU countries outside the Schengen zone.

Kosovo

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives Her Majesty's Government are taking to assist the restoration of municipal Government in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [97403]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has responsibility for restoring municipal government in Kosovo. The United Kingdom is making a major contribution to UNMIK in terms of finance and personnel. One of the five UNMIK District Administrators in Kosovo is a British national. Four UK local government and two central government experts are working as part of the United Nations civil administration to advise and assist re-establishment of local government in Kosovo. One of the UK secondees, formerly involved in local government in Northern Ireland, has been appointed UN civil administrator for the city of Pristina.

Afghanistan

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the UK will continue to impose an arms embargo on Afghanistan in line with the EU's Common Position of 17 December 1996. [98111]

Mr. Hain: We remain committed to the EU arms embargo against Afghanistan which the UK interprets as covering all goods and technology entered on Part III to Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended.

Following consultations with this Department and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry has issued three licences for the export of mine clearance equipment for use by the United Nations and The Halo Trust to aid their demining activities in Afghanistan. The grant of these licences is for humanitarian purposes.

British Nationals (Overseas Trials)

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of his Department in respect of British nationals on trial overseas. [98112]

Mr. Battle: I would like to take this opportunity to clarify the oral answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) on 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *80*. The FCO takes no view as to the innocence or guilt of British nationals on trial overseas—that is a matter for the courts. International law does not allow the FCO to interfere in the judicial procedures of other sovereign states, just as we would not tolerate other countries interfering in our own judicial procedures.

The FCO therefore cannot intervene in the trials of British nationals overseas. However, the FCO will do everything it can to ensure that such nationals have access to legal representation, and insist that they are treated as well as nationals of the countries concerned.

Chinese President (State Visit)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) of 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *993*, on the Chinese State visit, *(a)* for what reason no minutes were taken of these meetings and whether that is normal practice and *(b)* if he will name the officers from (i) the Metropolitan Police and (ii) the Cambridgeshire Constabulary who attended these meetings. [97508]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) on 4 November 1999, *Official Report* columns *271–72*.

Drugs (Precursors)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions (i) he and (ii) his Department has had with the Governments of Peru and Colombia about the export of precursors to drugs; and if he will make a statement. [96497]

Mr. Battle: We share the increasing international concern about precursors. We have frequent exchanges with Peru and Colombia at Ministerial and official level on drugs issues. These cover all aspects of the problems which drugs present to our societies, including the problem of the diversion into drugs production of legitimately exported chemicals.

In 1995, the European Community signed agreements with Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela aimed at preventing the diversion of precursor chemicals.

UK law enforcement agencies work closely with their counterparts in other countries to counter such diversion.

Extradition

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to enter into bilateral agreements under Article 98 of the International Court Statute which would prevent the extradition of nationals to *(a)* the court and *(b)* a third country. [97828]

Mr. Hain: We have no plans to enter into new bilateral agreements which would prevent the surrender of British nationals to the International Criminal Court under Article 98 of the Court's Statute. Article 98 relates to surrender of persons to the International Criminal Court; it does not relate to extradition to a third country.

Entry Clearance (Subcontinent)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long a person applying for entry clearance for settlement in June, July and August can be expected to have to wait for an interview in each queue at each post in the Indian subcontinent. [96617]

Mr. Vaz *[pursuant to his reply, 3 November 1999, c. 186]:* An administrative error led to an omission in my answer of 3 November to my hon. Friend. The complete answer should read as follows.

The statistics are as follows:

Waiting times in weeks on last day of month

Post	*Queue*	*June*	*July*	*August*
India				
Bombay	Q1	0	0	0
	Q2	6	5	4
	Q3	6	5	5
	Q4	6	5	5
Calcutta	[1]—	0.4	1	0
Madras	[1]—	8	4	3
New Delhi	Q1	0	0	0
	Q2	15	15	16
	Q3	27	26	23
	Q4	31	35	34
Pakistan				
Islamabad	Q1	12	8	7
	Q2	43	40.5	39
	Q3	47	46	43
	Q4	56	54	51
Karachi	[1]—	8	10	9
Bangladesh				
Dhaka	Q1	11	13	14
	Q2	22	20	21
	Q3	11	10	10
	Q4	52	44	46
Sri Lanka				
Colombo	[1]—	12	11	9

[1] Calcutta, Colombo, Karachi and Madras do not operate separate queues.

Note:
Queue 1—Right of Abode cases and Dependant Relatives over 65;
Queue 2—Spouses and Children under 18;
Queue 3—Fiance(e)s and Other First Time Applicants; and
Queue 4—Re-applicants

The extended queues in Islamabad and Dhaka in particular are a consequence of seasonal pressures. We have deployed additional staff to Islamabad to deal with increased applications for short term visits.

Central and Eastern Europe

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what programmes and resources British Trade International and his Department have to support companies which wish to make investments in Central and Eastern Europe; [97865]

(2) what programmes and resources British Trade International and his Department have to assist companies looking into the feasibility of making investments in Central and Eastern Europe. [97864]

Mr. Battle: Companies wishing to invest in Central and Eastern Europe, like those exporting to those markets, are supported by a variety of British Trade International schemes. These include support for inward and outward trade missions, trade fairs and promotional seminars, and the Export Marketing Research Scheme which is being extended to cover better the needs of outward investors.

This year British Trade International's budget for promoting trade and investment opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe is £3.5 million.

PRIME MINISTER

Qualified Majority Voting

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if it is the Government's policy to support, at the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference, extension of qualified majority voting to include treaty modification; and if he will make a statement; [96570]

(2) if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the extension of qualified majority voting, set out in the Von Weizsäcker/Dehaene/Simon report. [96577]

The Prime Minister: The Government have already made it clear that they will consider the extension of qualified majority voting on a case by case basis. Where it is in Britain's interests we shall support it. But where key national interests need to be protected, such as border controls, defence, Treaty change and taxation, we shall insist on retaining unanimity.

European Charter of Rights

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 1 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *3*, on the European Charter of Rights, *(a)* when he expects to publish the name and qualifications of the personal representative he is nominating to the drafting body of the working group and *(b)* what items he expects to be included in such a charter additional to those in the existing European Convention and those capable of introduction under existing treaty powers. [97954]

The Prime Minister: The Finnish Presidency has now confirmed that the first meeting of the drafting body will take place on 17 December. I will therefore announce the details of my representative shortly.

I believe that the Charter should make it easier for EU citizens to know the civil and political rights they already enjoy under the Treaties, including those covered by Article 6.2 of the Treaty on European Union. The Cologne Conclusions, copies of which were placed in the Libraries, provide further indications of the ground that might be covered.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Flight Crew Licensing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is taking at European Communities Level to enforce compliance with the age limits in the joint aviation requirement on flight crew licensing. [97144]

Mr. Mullin: Under Council Regulation 3922–91 on the harmonisation of aviation technical standards the national aviation authorities of member states are required to be members of the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA). The Regulation also adopted some of the JAA's Joint Aviation Requirements (JARs) as the European Community's harmonised standard and established a procedure to adopt future JARs as the EC standard. Where a JAR has not yet been adopted under EC law, JAA member states implement them under national law and are obliged, under the JAA Arrangements, to use their best efforts to implement JARs by the due date. The JAR on Flight Crew Licensing (JAR-FCL) was adopted by the JAA in 1996 with an implementation date of 1 July 1999.

JARs generally set standards that are compatible with those set by the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) under the terms of the Chicago Convention, but can introduce differences, so long as member states notify the differences to ICAO. In drawing up the JAR-FCL, the JAA determined that commercial pilots can safely be licensed to the age of sixty five, provided that only one pilot in a multi pilot aircraft may be over 60: this differs from the ICAO standard under which a person can only act as a pilot in command if they are under 60. The UK and most other JAA member states are, or are in the process of, applying this age limit. However, the French Authorities are continuing to apply the ICAO age limits within French airspace, although co-pilots up to the age of 65 are permitted. The UK has raised this matter both within the JAA and directly with the French authorities.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions since May 1997, on what dates, and for what duration he met representatives of the air traffic controllers to discuss the Government's proposals for the National Air Traffic Services. [97248]

Mr. Mullin: Since May 1997, Ministers in this Department have met representatives of air traffic controllers on eight separate occasions.

Household Waste

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the targets, and corresponding dates, for the increase in the recycling of household waste; and if he will make a statement. [97140]

Mr. Mullin: In the draft waste strategy "A Way with Waste", published on 30 June 1999 by my Department and the Welsh Office, we have set a goal of recycling or composting 30 per cent. of household waste by 2010. We will aim to meet the existing target of recycling or composting 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005.

By 2015 we expect to recover value from two thirds of our household waste, with at least half of this through recycling or composting.

Devolution of responsibility for waste policy means that final decisions about the way the strategy is taken forward in Wales will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Loft Insulation

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of houses in England and Wales have *(a)* three, *(b)* four, *(c)* five and *(d)* six inches of loft insulation. [97226]

Mr. Mullin: It is estimated that around 15 per cent., 24 per cent., 10 per cent. and 17 per cent. of homes with accessible lofts in England and Wales have respectively three, four, five and six inches or more of loft insulation. A further 11 per cent. have two inches or less and in 13 per cent. of cases the depth of the insulation is not known. Over 6 per cent. have no loft insulation and there are no data for the remaining 3 per cent. of homes.

Source:

GfK Home Audit, Ownership of home insulation at December 1998.

In-flight Incidents

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which body is responsible for monitoring complaints by air passengers regarding perceived dangerous in-flight incidents. [97265]

Mr. Mullin: The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for the safety regulation of UK registered aircraft and airlines. Under the Air Navigation Order UK airlines are required to report all in-flight occurrences which could affect the safety of the aircraft so that the CAA can monitor airline safety performance. The CAA review all such reports and publish a monthly summary. If a passenger has a concern about an in-flight incident on a UK airline they should take it up with the airline concerned in the first instance. If they are not happy with the response they should write to the CAA.

The safety regulation of foreign airlines is primarily the responsibility of the State in which the airline is based. Foreign airlines operating to the UK are required to comply with the minimum standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. When the Department receives a complaint from a passenger which indicates that a foreign airline operating to the UK is not complying with ICAO standards we will follow the matter up with the airline concerned, or its regulatory authority.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what relationship he proposes between Regional Development Agencies and local authority development agencies. [97837]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Working in partnership is a central part of the new approach in the regions. We asked the Regional Development Agencies to draw up their regional strategies in conjunction with regional partners, including local authorities and the private and voluntary sectors.

Implementing the strategies will also require genuine partnership working, since it requires co-ordination and coherence in policies and across programmes.

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what part regional development agencies will play in the development and implementation of local transport policies. [97835]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Regional Planning Guidance incorporates regional transport strategies which in turn inform local transport plans. RDAs are key partners in the preparation of RPG and draw attention to the transport priorities as they see them related to their regional economic strategies.

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what relationship he proposes between regional development agencies and local authorities. [97836]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Our regional agenda, set out in the 1997 White Paper "Building Partnerships for Prosperity" is based on a number of principles. These include the need for regional structures to be based on partnership, with each local or regional interest being able to contribute effectively towards an integrated and coherent strategic programme which commands general support. We have, therefore, asked the RDAs to proceed in dialogue with regional partners—local authorities and the private and voluntary sectors—and work to secure the support of regional interests.

Successful implementation of RDA strategies will mean genuine partnership working in the regions since it will involve co-ordination and coherence in policy and across programmes.

Local authorities have a significant stake in the work of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). Four of the thirteen board members of each RDA are drawn from local government.

The Regional Chambers will also be a key partner of the RDAs. The Chambers are local authority led, but also include representatives from business, the voluntary sector and others. Their statutory functions include commenting on the RDAs' strategies and receiving reports on the RDAs' activities.

House Conveyancing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes in the law will be required to implement the Government's policy for speeding up the process of buying and selling homes in England and Wales. [96379]

Mr. Mullin: We believe that most of the actions we are seeking from service providers can be achieved on a voluntary basis, except that home buyers' searches will probably need to be put on a statutory footing. However, sellers' information packs will need to be made compulsory to ensure that everyone benefits from them. The surveyor will be liable both to the seller and the buyer for the House Condition Report which will be part of the seller's information pack. These changes will require legislation and we plan to do this as soon as a suitable opportunity arises.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

South Africa

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many advisers the South African Sandmen's Institute employ, who are funded by her Department, to work with the San bushmen of South Africa. [97264]

Clare Short: My Department is contributing to the running costs of the South African San Institute (SAS) office in Cape Town, and with the establishment of an office in the Northern Cape to support the San communities located in Schmitsdrift near Kimberley, and throughout the Mier area, near the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park. This will include up to ten full-time staff whose costs are met by the Department for International Development (DFID). Funds are also available for the provision of short term expertise to support the components of the programme of activities in support of the San communities.

Pakistan

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid programmes her Department is supporting in the current financial year in Pakistan; at what cost; and what was the comparable figure for 1998–99. [97582]

Clare Short: On October 15 after the military coup in Pakistan, I announced a freeze on all British assistance to the Government of Pakistan and a continuation of all our programmes that directly help the poor. At this stage it is impossible to predict what our 1999–2000 spend will be. Provisional DFID programme expenditure for the 1998–99 financial year is £24.24 million.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimates he has made of expenditure on Lottery ticket sales as *(a)* a percentage of household income and *(b)* a share of total ticket sales for each income decile. [97054]

Kate Hoey: My Department has made no such estimates. However, there is an analysis of National Lottery ticket sales by income category in the National Lottery Commission's Social Research Programme Report,

Number 1, published in May 1999. I have arranged for copies of this Report to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

St. James's Park and Green Park

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will make a statement on the depredations by foxes on wildlife in St. James's Park and Green Park; [97220]

(2) how many of the Laysan Teal introduced to St. James's Park have *(a)* survived and *(b)* died; [97219]

(3) if he will make a statement on the cause of death of the Laysan Teal in St. James's Park. [97218]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Welch to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 19 November 1999:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about foxes and the numbers and fate of Laysan Teal in St. James's Park.

No foxes actually live in St. James's Park or Green Park although they do regularly come into the parks. The nearest live in the grounds of Lancaster House and under a portacabin in the Treasury building compound. Foxes live largely on rodents, sick pigeons and refuse, which are readily available within the park. They only occasionally take birds and this is only really a problem in winter when the lake freezes over, allowing them to gain access to the two islands. To prevent this, the gamekeepers break the ice between the shore and the islands.

Six Laysan Teal were introduced into the wildlife collection in St. James's Park about three years ago, of which only one is still alive. The other five have died over the last two years, but as the carcases have not been found it is not possible to say how they died.

DEFENCE

Multi-role Armoured Vehicle

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of the Multi-role Armoured Vehicle; and if he will make a statement. [96981]

Mr. Spellar: The precise number of vehicles required has yet to be defined, but on current planning the estimated total procurement cost to the UK will be over £1 billion. That includes the cost of procuring the vehicles and supporting them for the first two years of their service life.

Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to the public purse, *(a)* directly and *(b)* in terms of the time of officials, of supporting the Defence Systems Equipment International Exhibition; and if he will review the need for future public sector support. [96901]

Mr. Kilfoyle: In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *33*, my predecessor outlined that the principal costs for the exhibition would fall to the organisers, Spearhead Exhibitions Ltd., but that my Department would make a contribution towards the cost of the official missions to be invited by Her Majesty's Government. We estimated the direct costs to MOD for this to be about £250,000. In the event, official delegations from over 50 countries attended and the final cost remains to be established, although we do not anticipate it will exceed the estimated figure. In addition, the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) organised a British Army Demonstration Area at the exhibition which featured a range of UK equipment; the estimated direct cost of this was £108,000. MOD officials and military personnel carried out activities associated with the exhibition as part of their duties, but these costs could be fully identified only at disproportionate cost. A number of MOD Agencies and organisations also participated at the exhibition, the costs for which are not held centrally. MOD support for future exhibitions will be considered in the light of our experience of this year's DSEi and plans for 2001.

Raytheon AIM-120 Programme

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the performance of the ramjet-powered variant of Raytheon's AIM-120 programme. [97134]

Mr. Kilfoyle: My Department was made aware of and attended in 1997 a ground based system demonstration firing undertaken in the United States to demonstrate ducted ramjet powered motor technology. No detailed assessment has been made on any ramjet powered variant of Raytheon's AIM-120 programme.

International Criminal Court

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had concerning the implications for future British involvement in peacekeeping operations of ratification of the International Criminal Court. [97515]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) gave him on 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *409*.

Armed Forces (Peacekeeping)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which forces, listed in the Memorandum of Understanding with the UN on forces available for peacekeeping operations, are unavailable; what proportion of earmarked forces this represents; and if he will make a statement on the purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding. [97763]

Mr. Hoon: The purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to demonstrate our continued commitment to the UN. The MOU provides the planning staff in the UN with details of those UK forces on which it might be able to call. Whether those forces are available for any particular operation depends on the nature, location and duration of the operation; and other continuing or known future commitments.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of HM armed forces who were in active service during the Gulf War are known to be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. [97635]

Mr. Spellar: The MOD holds information on those Gulf veterans who were referred by their Service Medical Officer or GP for assessment at the MOD's Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme (MAP). Since its establishment in October 1993 and up to 4 November 1999, the MAP has seen 2,893 patients. Of these, 2,283 have had their clinical findings recorded on the MAP database. Of the 2,283, 214 Gulf veterans have a recorded diagnosis of PTSD confirmed by a consultant psychiatrist. Of the 214 patients, the number still suffering from PTSD is not known since the MAP does not routinely monitor their health status nor is it responsible for providing treatment. As the veterans assessed by the programme were all self-selected, these figures cannot be used to determine the extent of PTSD in Gulf veterans as a whole. I will write to the right hon. and learned Gentlemen with information on the prevalence of PTSD in the remaining MAP patients who were seen up to 4 November once their medical notes have been reviewed and catalogued.

However, the MOD does not keep a central record of all diagnoses made on currently serving personnel. Responsibility for the health of ex-service personnel, if resident in the UK, lies with the NHS which similarly does not keep a central record on all diagnoses. Neither does the NHS routinely communicate diagnostic information to the MOD. No arrangements are in place to monitor the health of ex-service personnel living overseas. Therefore, the total number of service people on active service in 1990–91 or of Gulf veterans suffering from PTSD is not known.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of *(a)* the Royal Navy, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Army have been medically discharged solely for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder since 1995. [97637]

Mr. Spellar: The numbers of personnel medically discharged from the armed forces since 1 January 1995 solely on grounds of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are shown in the table:

	Number
Royal Navy	23
Army	38
RAF	10

Note:
Figures as reported up to and including 4 November 1999

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the investigations which have been commissioned by medical officers in each year since 1990 regarding the frequency of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among serving members of the armed forces. [97636]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the answer given by my predecessor to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 10 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *216*.

Reservists

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists served in the Balkans theatre with *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the RAF and *(c)* the Royal Navy in each year since 1994; with which units they served; what percentage of forces deployed to the theatre they represented; for each service in each year what was the average length of service of reservists; and if he will make a statement. [97615]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not available in the form requested, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Since operations commenced in December 1995, reserve forces personnel have represented around 10 per cent. of UK forces deployed in the Balkans theatre.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the readiness cycle for mobilisation for operations in *(a)* the Territorial Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy Reserve, *(c)* the Royal Auxiliary Airforce and *(d)* among sponsored reservists for the deployment of (i) formed units and (ii) individual members to regular units; and if he will make a statement. [97662]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Volunteer reserve units from all the Services are held at readiness levels appropriate to their role. In the case of the Territorial Army, this varies from 30 days to 24 months. Following call out, a unit would be required to undergo a period of training before deployment on operations. Individual Territorial Army members called out to serve with the Regular Army are trained at the Reserves Training and Mobilisation Centre and then deployed to theatre. Royal Naval Reserve personnel, when mobilised, are deployed as individuals to augment regular units rather than in formed units. It is anticipated that the majority of RNR personnel would be ready to deploy within 30 days of receipt of their call out notice. RAF Planning assumptions also provide for individual reservists to be ready for deployment within 30 days of call out. Operational requirements may necessitate reduced periods of notice and training, and planning is carried out for such contingencies.

High Readiness Reserves largely drawn from the Territorial Army, have accepted an enhanced liability for call out for permanent service, and in most cases are held at seven days notice to report for duty.

There are no sponsored reserves currently in service.

Amphibious Readiness Group

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what forces make up the UK's Amphibious Readiness Group. [97878]

Mr. Spellar: The UK's Amphibious Readiness Group is not a standing force and there are no specific forces assigned. The composition of the Group would be dependent on operational considerations and force availability at the time.

Saffron Sands

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK troops participated in the Saffron Sands exercise; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [97877]

Mr. Spellar: A total of 600 troops were deployed on Exercise Saffron Sands this year at a cost of approximately £600K.

Low Flying

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the *(a)* safety and *(b)* continuing need for practice low flying for (i) home and (ii) NATO defence commitments. [97929]

Mr. Kilfoyle: We continue to pay close attention to the need for low flying when assessing our national and international military training requirements. Low level penetration of hostile airspace remains an effective tactic in many scenarios. The high readiness states which our aircrew have to maintain for participation in operations or preparation for conflict only allows for the honing of low flying expertise, not its creation. All aspects of flight safety are kept under continuous review.

Uranium Oxide

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the depleted uranium in armour-piercing ammunition is converted upon impact to insoluble oxide particles of less than 10 microns in diameter; and what parameters, transfer coefficients and methodologies are used in estimating the radiological effects of such particles. [97689]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [96914]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry applies depreciation to its fixed assets on a straight line basis, over the useful economic life of each asset. Depreciation is charged in the month of disposal but not in the month of purchase.

Depreciation is not charged on freehold land, investment properties, assets declared surplus and for sale and assets under the course of construction.

Fixed asset lives are normally in the following ranges:

Fixed assets	*Years*
Freehold Buildings	5 to 60
Plant, Office, Scientific, IT equipment	3 to 15
Fixtures and fittings	5 to 10
Vehicles	4 to 15
Vessels	20

Assets are revalued annually and depreciation is adjusted accordingly.

Property assets are subject to a full valuation review every five years and the values and lives are adjusted accordingly.

The above depreciation method is in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual and the requirements in the manual regarding those methods will be underpinned by Financial Reporting Standard 15 'Tangible Fixed Assets', issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

Offshore Bass Fishing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he proposes to take, following the Offshore Bass Fishery Pilot Study report, to control trawl fishing for bass; and if he will make a statement. [97141]

Mr. Morley: I announced on 18 October as public consultation on proposals to restrict landings of bass by British fishing vessels to 5 tonnes per week, in the light of concerns about the impact of the spring offshore fishery on the bass stock. I have arranged for copies of the consultation document to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Fisheries

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many EU vessels, by nationality, are covered by agreements with non-EU countries for fisheries access; what is the total cost of these agreements to the EU budget; and if he will deposit the Commission report on third country fisheries agreements in the Library. [97521]

Mr. Morley: I have placed a copy of the summary report on the "Evaluation of the Fisheries Agreements Concluded by the European Community", prepared for the European Commission by IFREMER, in the Library of the House.

According to this report, the average annual number of licences issued to EU vessels to fish in third country waters between 1993 and 1997, broken down by nationality, is as follows:

Country	*Total average annual number of licences*
Austria	0
Belgium	62
Denmark	865
Finland	5
France	255
Germany	159
Greece	1
Ireland	2
Italy	11
Luxembourg	0
Netherlands	187
Portugal	46
Spain	953
Sweden	54
UK	433

The report also indicates that the average annual total cost to the EU budget of agreements with third countries between 1993 and 1997 was 211 million euros.

Organic Farming

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what funding his

Department has provided for research and development into organic farming for each year from 1992 to date; and if he will make a statement. [97280]

Mr. Morley: MAFF has provided the following funds for research and development into organic farming since 1992:

Year	*£000*
1991–92	481
1992–93	720
1993–94	1,077
1994–95	1,058
1995–96	931
1996–97	1,116
1997–98	908
1998–99	1,481
1999–2000[1]	2,139

[1] Estimate

This includes research funded within the organic farming research programme and £323K funded under the Open Contract Scheme over the period.

In addition the organic farming sector also benefits from much of the other research the Ministry undertakes, for example, its planned spend of over £8 million on biological control techniques, plant health, animal welfare and wildlife conservation on farms this year.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the approved length of time needed to convert farms to organic farming for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the average EU member state. [97639]

Mr. Morley: Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 provides that as a general rule for organic products, except for perennial crops, the conversion period for the land should be two years before the first planting of a crop to be sold as organic. In the case of perennial crops the period is three years before the first harvest of products to be sold as organic. However, these periods may be varied, having regard to the previous use of the land.

In the UK the majority of conversions will extend over the full periods prescribed by Regulation 2092/91. However, shorter periods are sometimes agreed by the control body (the UK Register of Organic Food Standards) in cases where there is clear evidence that prohibited inputs have not been used on the land (e.g. the land has been subject to an environmental scheme which prohibits such inputs). Other member states are subject to the same Regulation and operate similar rules.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what forecast he has made of the future take-up of grant aid for conversion to organic farming. [97843]

Mr. Morley: On 4 October, we announced a review of the Organic Farming Scheme, which provides aid to farmers converting to organic farming. Future up-take of aid is an issue which will be considered in this review.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the growth of the UK organic food market over the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [97940]

Mr. Morley: None. Estimates made by the organic sector itself indicate the size of the retail market for organic food to have been just short of £400 million in 1998–99 and project its growth to £1,500 million by 2002–03.

Fishing Fleets

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of EU national fishing fleets are based in objective 1 areas, broken down by country. [97525]

Mr. Morley: For the UK, the Objective 1 areas under the 1994–1999 Structural Funds Programme are the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Merseyside. Vessels with home ports in these areas make up approximately 26 percent. of the UK fleet as at 1 November 1999.

The Objective 1 areas under the 2000–06 Structural Funds Programme are West Wales and the Valleys, Cornwall and Merseyside. Vessels with home ports in these areas make up approximately 14 percent. of the UK fleet as at 1 November 1999.

Under the 2000–06 Structural Funds Programme, the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and Northern Ireland are transitional Objective 1 areas. Vessels with home ports in these areas, plus West Wales and the Valleys, Cornwall and Merseyside make up approximately 39 percent. of the UK fleet as at 1 November 1999.

We do not have similar statistics for the fleets in Objective 1 areas of other member states.

Live Exports

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to discourage vessels which carry live farm animals from Dover to the continent from sailing *(a)* during severe weather conditions and *(b)* when severe weather conditions are forecast. [97552]

Mr. Morley: MAFF officials on duty at Dover docks have instructions to follow on any occasion when a vessel operator intends to carry livestock for slaughter or further fattening when wind conditions are forecast to reach Force 7 or more during the voyage, and/or the sea state is forecast as rough or worse. These instructions require them to discuss with the master of the vessel his legal obligation to consider if the animals are likely to be caused injury or unnecessary suffering due to adverse weather or sea conditions likely to be encountered during the voyage. If the master decides to sail but our staff have grounds to consider that animals may suffer, they have the legal powers to prevent him from transporting the animals.

Diversification Grants

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce diversification grants in non-assisted areas. [97841]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 3 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 223.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Assets

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the assets sold by his Department, indicating their value broken down by item, for each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99 together with an estimate of the value of asset sales planned to be made within 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [95467]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* The detailed information is not available in the format or for the years requested. However, the following information can be provided for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments from the 1997–98 financial year:

£000

Year	*Land and buildings*	*Vehicles, plant and machinery*	*Computer and office equipment*
1997–98	19,378	364	15
1998–99	21,502	896	43
1999–2000	18,535	527	9
2000–01	15,611	527	2

[1] Estimate

RUC Land Rover Crews

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what equipment is issued to the crews of Royal Ulster Constabulary Land Rovers assigned to public order duties to assist in dealing with public order disturbances. [95365]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The following equipment is issued to officers and crews of Mobile Support Units:

Individual issue:

Riot helmet and visor
Header (flame resistant)
Thermal underwear
Flame retardant suit
Public order gloves
Public order boots
Arm and elbow guards
Shin and knee guards
Ballistically protected body armour
26 inch nylon public order baton
Personal firearm
Water bottle
Handcuffs

Crew issue:

Public order shields
Small fire extinguishers
Bulk water containers
First aid kit (including fire blanket)
Heckler and Koch riot gun (for firing plastic baton rounds).

Prisoners (Early Release)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review whether members of the UVF should qualify for early release under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. [97821]

Mr. Ingram: The situation with regard to the maintenance of the ceasefires is kept under continual review.

If there is evidence that in balance an organisation is not maintaining its ceasefire, the Government will not hesitate to take action.

Quinn Murders

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the person recently found guilty of the murder of the Quinn children has been accepted in the prison as a member of the UVF group there. [97822]

Mr. Ingram: The prisoner in question is serving his life sentence at HMP Maghaberry, a fully integrated establishment with no facility for segregation according to paramilitary affiliation. He has not made any application to be transferred to HMP Maze, nor have the UVF prisoners there made any representations for transfer on his behalf.

Child Care (Expenditure)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional funding, excluding funds for training, was provided to each of the health and social services boards for implementation of the Children (NI) Order 1995 in the financial years 1995–96 to date. [97688]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is given in the table.

Additional funding for implementation of the Children (NI) Order

£000

Health and Social Services Board	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Northern	611	547	956	1,768
Southern	462	414	713	1,322
Eastern	1,058	947	1,727	3,175
Western	424	379	670	1,235

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the actual spend on child care services in each health and social services board from April 1996 to March 1999. [97687]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is given in the table.

Actual spend on child care services

£000

Health and Social Services Board	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Northern	11,295	13,431	13,370
Southern	8,387	9,765	9,761
Eastern	29,581	33,125	36,494
Western	11,215	12,914	14,342

Source:

The annual financial returns of the Health and Social Services Boards for Family and Child Care Services

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Community Legal Service

35. **Angela Smith:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about the Community Legal Service and the services it will provide. [96383]

Mr. Lock: The Community Legal Service will provide local networks of good quality legal services, based for the first time on local needs and priorities. They will work towards providing a seamless service to the public through an active referral system, so people will receive the right service, of the right quality, at the right price to allow them to resolve disputes, enforce their rights or seek the protection of the courts.

Family Law

36. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to promote the interests of children and families in court proceedings. [96384]

Jane Kennedy: One of the major initiatives my Department is taking forward is the setting up of the Children and Family Court Advisory Service. It brings together the Family Court Welfare Service function, provided by the Probation Service, the Children's Branch of the Official Solicitor's Department and the Guardian ad Litem and Reporting Officer Service. This will protect the interests of children and families in the court system.

Magistracy

37. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on progress in the reform of selection criteria for magistrates. [96385]

Jane Kennedy: The Lord Chancellor set out the personal qualities required for appointment in his Directions for Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace issued in August 1998. Advisory Committees must take into account the need for benches to be balanced in terms of gender, ethnic origin, occupation, place of residence and social 'background'. Since the beginning of this century, social background has been linked to party affiliation. This has been supported by successive Lord Chancellors. This Government are not, however, convinced that political balance is an adequate proxy and an alternative is being sought.

Rural Magistrates Courts

38. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his policy on rural magistrates courts. [96387]

39. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards magistrates courts in rural England. [96388]

Jane Kennedy: The Government's policy is that magistrates courts are best managed locally by magistrates courts committees under the provisions of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997. Decisions concerning the future of magistrates courts in their area, whether rural or urban, are for the relevant magistrates courts committee to determine.

Motoring Offences (Magistrates)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training magistrates receive for dealing with motoring offenders in the ways most effective for reducing re-offending. [96641]

Jane Kennedy *[holding answer 3 November 1999]:* The training of magistrates is the responsibility of the magistrates courts committees within a framework approved by the Lord Chancellor. Magistrates must acquire specified competences necessary to perform their role, some of which relate to motoring offences. Magistrates also have access to detailed sentencing guidelines, produced by the Magistrates Association, some of which are specific to traffic offences. Magistrates are made aware of the availability of national and local initiatives which are designed to re-educate motoring offenders.

Law Commission's Reports

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to respond *(a)* to the Law Commission's report of March 1998 on liability for psychiatric illness and *(b)* to the Law Commission's report of December 1997 on aggravated and exemplary damages. [97540]

Mr. Lock: I am pleased to be able to announce that the Government accept the recommendations on aggravated and restitutionary damages that the Law Commission made in "Aggravated, Exemplary and Restitutionary Damages" (Law Com Rep No. 247). They will legislate when a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

This Report also made recommendations for legislation on exemplary, or punitive, damages. The Government are grateful to the Law Commission for its important and painstaking work on this subject, and to those who expressed their views during the Law Commission's consultation exercises on the topic. The contending arguments for a complete legislative overhaul of exemplary damages, as recommended by the Law Commission, or abolition as preferred by many commentators, are finely balanced. In the absence of a clear consensus on the issue the Government have decided not to take forward the Law Commission's proposals for legislation on exemplary damages. It may be that some further judicial development of the law in this area might help clarify the issues.

The Government have carefully considered the Law Commission's recommendations in its Report on "Liability for Psychiatric Illness" (Law Com Rep No. 249). They believe that it would be worthwhile to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the individual and aggregate effects of the proposals for legislation that are contained in this Report and "Damages for Personal Injury: Medical, Nursing and Other Expenses; Collateral Benefits" (Law Com Rep No. 262) and "Claims for Wrongful Death" (Law Com Rep No. 263). I have asked my officials to undertake the assessment in co-ordination with officials from the other Departments which have an interest in the outcome. It is hoped that the full assessment

will be available to inform the Government's final decision on the Law Commission's proposals early next year.

This assessment is only concerned with those Reports which recommend legislation concerning eligibility for damages and the size of damages awards. It will not consider "Damages for Personal Injury: Non-Pecuniary Loss (Law Commission Report No. 257)", in which the Law Commission offers opinions of which the courts are free to take such account, if any, as they choose in the assessment of damages. This is an area of law which is in the courts' independefit sphere and where the Government have no plans to legislate.

Social Security Commissioners

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for each of the last three years, what is *(a)* the average, *(b)* the longest and *(c)* the median time taken by Social Security Commissioners between conducting an appeal hearing and reaching a decision. [97538]

Jane Kennedy: The data requested are not held centrally and could be provided only by referring to each individual case file, which would be at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for each of the last three years, what is *(a)* the average, *(b)* the longest and *(c)* the median length of time between the lodging of an appeal to the Social Security Commissioners and the hearing of the appeal. [97537]

Jane Kennedy: The information is not available in the form requested. However, many appeals are determined without a hearing. The average waiting time from the lodging of an appeal to the Commissioner's decision for each of the last three years is as follows; 1996—54.75 weeks, 1997—54.64 weeks and 1998—64.27 weeks. The average waiting time in 1999 to the end of September is 50.9 weeks.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for each of the last three years, what is the *(a)* average, *(b)* longest and *(c)* median number of appeals (i) heard and (ii) decided by Social Security Commissioners. [97539]

Jane Kennedy: The data are not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the table gives the number of appeals determined in each year and the number of oral hearings conducted by the Commissioners.

Year	*Appeals determined*	*Oral hearings*
1996	4,197	340
1997	3,926	326
1998	4,317	254

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for each of the last three years, how many appeals were lodged with the Social Security Commissioners; and how many were successful *(a)* in full and *(b)* in part. [97536]

Jane Kennedy: The number of appeals lodged and the number of appeals which were successful are detailed in the table. Information is not kept as to whether appeals were successful in full or in part and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Year	*Appeals lodged*	*Appeals determined*	*Appeals determined in Claimant's favour*
1996	3,731	4,197	1,909
1997	3,400	3,926	2,939
1998	2,688	4,317	3,210

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proportion of complaints against the CSA are investigated *(a)* by the Independent Case Examiner and *(b)* by the Parliamentary Ombudsman; [96763]

(2) what is the current backlog of CSA investigations; and what is his estimate of the length of time needed to clear the backlog *(a)* with the Independent Complaints Examiner and *(b)* with the Ombudsman; [96759]

(3) how many staff the Independent Case Examiner for the Child Support Agency employs; how many are investigating officers; and what plans he has for further recruitment; [96761]

(4) what is the trend in the numbers of complaints against the CSA being made to *(a)* the Independent Complaints Commissioner and *(b)* the Ombudsman; [96760]

(5) what is the average time for the completion of *(a)* Independent Case Examiners and *(b)* Parliamentary Ombudsman investigations of CSA cases (i) from the time when the cause for complaint arises; (ii) from the submission of a complaint and (iii) from the start of the investigation. [96762]

Angela Eagle: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Peter Bradley, dated 5 November 1999:

In Faith Boardman's absence, as Deputy Chief Executive, I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions about the Independent Case Examiner (ICE) for the Child Support Agency and the Ombudsman.

During 1998/99 28,073 complaints were received by the Agency, 1,536 (5.18%) were received by ICE and 45 (0.15%) were accepted by the Ombudsman for full investigation, a total of 29,654. This total includes cases double counted where they were first dealt with by CSA and then by ICE/Ombudsman.

It may be of interest to note that the 28,073 complaints received by CSA represents a 0.7% increase over the previous year. However, our caseload increased by 22% to 923,960. As a percentage of caseload the complaints rate for the year reduced by 17%.

ICE have 195 cases awaiting investigation and, if intake levels remain unchanged, they would expect this number to reduce to around 50 by March 2000. I cannot answer the part of your question about the Ombudsman's backlog, if indeed there is one, because that

is not a matter for the Department of Social Security or its Agencies. Similarly with your questions about trends and clearance times, I would suggest that you approach the Ombudsman's office directly.

46 staff are currently employed by ICE, of which 38 are engaged in investigation work. There are no plans to recruit additional staff.

I have attached a month by month breakdown of the numbers of complaints received by ICE. It is clear from this that the first six months of ICE operation were unrepresentative. You will see that since October 1997, following publication of their first Annual Report, there is no discernible trend up or down, especially as a percentage of the Agency's rising caseload.

No records are held which would allow your question about clearance times to be fully answered without revisiting all cases to extract the information required. However, ICE do record the time taken from receipt of a complaint in the ICE office. Up to the end of September 1999 the average clearance time for a complaint is 29.8 weeks.

A process was introduced in 1998/99 which allows appropriate cases to be identified and referred to the Child Support Agency for early resolution of the problem by taking prompt action. Thus negating the need for a full investigation by ICE. One effect of this initiative is to lengthen the average time taken to resolve those complaints where early resolution proved impossible and full investigation was needed.

I hope this is helpful.

Complaints received by Independent Case Examiner

Month	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
January	—	112	124
February	—	108	139
March	—	126	154
April	21	116	127
May	48	102	101
June	69	122	104
July	72	116	[1]66
August	82	107	144
September	94	164	119
October	137	132	—
November	110	153	—
December	108	107	—

[1] Due to office reorganisation a proportion of the July intake is recorded in August

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 27 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns *875–76*, if he will estimate the number of non-resident parents who, because they receive income support or other related benefit, are deemed by the Child Support Agency to have nil maintenance liability. [96979]

Angela Eagle: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 5 November 1999:

In Faith Boardman's absence, as Deputy Chief Executive, I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his Answer of 27 October (Official report, columns 875–6).

Table 3.3 on page 31 of the Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary of Statistics for May 1999, the latest published figures, provides an estimate of 289,400 non-resident parents in receipt of Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance Income Based with nil maintenance liability.

I hope this is helpful.

State Pension

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) of 27 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *876*, on the state pension, what rates of increase in average earnings were assumed in calculating the cost of uprating the basic pension in line with earnings. [97555]

Mr. Rooker: The assumed annual rate of increase in average earnings is 4.3 per cent. throughout the period.

Note:

Average earnings growth is based on a DSS assumption which is broadly consistent with the average of independent (non-Government) forecasts.

Observatory on Family Matters

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what function is performed by, the Observatory on Family Matters, appointed by the European Commission; what are its *(a)* terms of reference and *(b)* annual cost; and who represents Her Majesty's Government on it. [97955]

Angela Eagle: The European Observatory on National Family Policies is the responsibility of the European Commission. I understand that its membership involves academics who produce annual reports monitoring family policy in each member state at a cost to the European Commission of £400,000 annually. The Government are not represented on the Observatory but the current UK national expert is Ceridwen Roberts of the Family Policy Study Centre.

SCOTLAND

European Structural Funds

9. **Ms Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the criteria for eligibility for EU structural funds in Scotland. [96353]

Mr. Wilson: The framework for the new round of Structural Funds was set by decisions at the Berlin Summit in March 1999. As elsewhere in Great Britain, the criteria relate to industrial decline, urban deprivation, declining rural areas and fisheries dependency.

20. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the recent list of areas eligible for European structural funding in Scotland, compiled by UK ministers and sent to the European Commission for approval; and if he will make a statement. [96365]

Mr. Wilson: The detailed proposals for Scotland were based on recommendations by the Scottish Executive, prepared in close consultation with my department. Both I and the Scottish Executive have received a number of representations from different parts of Scotland, including from the North East. The Scottish Executive has made it clear that in implementing Structural Funds it will want to see transitional support concentrated on the highest priority areas which were not included in the proposals for full Objective 2 coverage.

27. **Mr. Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the prospects for the Scottish economy following the publication of the Government proposals on assisted areas and Objective 2 funds. [96372]

Mr. Wilson: Proposed new assisted areas announced in July provide continuing coverage for locations which account for a very high proportion of regional selective assistance awarded over recent years. Proposals for Objective 2 coverage put forward in October represent a fair balance between pressing needs in urban and rural Scotland, while transitional funding will be available for areas no longer covered by Objective 2 and Objective 5b. In each case the outcome should minimise any economic impact of the overall reduction in coverage being imposed for the period from January 2000.

Memorandum of Understanding

10. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, when he last met the First Minister, they discussed the memorandum of understanding and the implementation of concordats. [96354]

Dr. Reid: The First Minister and I have frequent meetings at which we discuss matters of mutual concern and interest. The Memorandum of Understanding and the overarching concordats, reinforce the principle of devolution which is that we have a Partnership of Parliaments. That is why the First Minister and I launched them jointly on 1 October.

New Deal

11. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the operation of the new deal in Scotland. [96355]

Dr. Reid: Thanks to the New Deal, 38,000 young people in Scotland so far have better prospects of long term employability and the self respect which comes from participation in work and society.

Small Business

12. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has made to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding the competitiveness of small firms in Scotland. [96356]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry published a consultation paper about the Small Business Service in June. 98 per cent. of businesses in Scotland employ less than 50 people and they account for around 45 per cent. of non-Government jobs. I, with my right hon. Friend, will consider how any measures within reserved competence can be applied most effectively in Scotland.

Single Currency

14. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what preparations his Department is making for the possible effects of entry of the UK into the eurozone on inward investment in Scotland. [96359]

Mr. Wilson: International investors look keenly at the stability of economies in making their decisions. This Government's commitment to lasting economic stability will ensure that, in or out of the single currency, Scotland and the UK offer the best possible climate for business investment and growth.

Coalfield Communities

15. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made through the Government task force on investment in the Scottish coalfield communities. [96360]

Mr. Wilson: The Coalfields Task Force is a UK wide initiative and an announcement on the allocation of the Coalfield Regeneration Trust's funding for Scotland will be made on 22 November.

Agriculture

16. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his recent discussions with the First Minister on the representation of Scottish agricultural issues at UKREP. [96361]

Dr. Reid: I have had a number of recent discussions with the First Minister on concordats in general and on the EU concordat in particular.

Meat Trade (Europe)

17. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the Scottish Executive concerning meat exports and imports to the European Union. [96362]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend has had no formal representations from the Scottish Executive on this issue but I am fully aware of how important it is to Scotland.

Clothing Industry

18. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of business and trade unions to discuss employment in the clothing industry in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [96363]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend has had the opportunity on a number of recent occasions to discuss, formally and informally, employment in the clothing industry in Scotland.

Beef Industry

19. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on prospects for the Scottish beef industry. [96364]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

City Status

21. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the granting of city status to Scottish towns. [96366]

22. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recommendations he has made to the Home Secretary regarding Scottish towns bidding for city status. [96367]

Dr. Reid: The competition for city status has attracted bids from four Scottish towns. Each of the towns has put in a good bid and each is deserving of further consideration. They all have unique qualities, including rich histories and Royal connections. I was particularly struck by their quality and the degree of local support they have each generated. I think it right that all four bids should have the opportunity to compete in the final stages, and I have therefore, indicated my support, to the Home Secretary, for all Scottish bids.

Working Families Tax Credit

23. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has made to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the number of people in Scotland who will be able to benefit from the working families tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [96368]

Dr. Reid: I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit, which could benefit up to 140,000 families in Scotland. People who think they may be eligible can ring a freephone number—0800 597 5976—to check eligibility and get application forms. 24,000 Scots have already done so. Those currently receiving Family Credit will automatically be sent an application form.

Anti-drugs Strategy

25. **Mrs. McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has held with the First Minister on the co-ordination of the Government's anti-drugs strategy. [96370]

Dr. Reid: I meet regularly with the First Minister and discuss a range of topics. The Government's anti-drugs strategy is on the agenda for our meeting immediately after my meeting next month with the Government's Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator.

Fuel Poverty

26. **Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he had with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on determining the proportion of total resources for tackling fuel poverty and cold homes which were allocated to Scotland. [96371]

Mr. Wilson: Discussions on the allocation of resources to Scotland for the years 1999/2000 to 2001/02 began under my right hon. Friend's predecessor. They were concluded after 1 July 1999, when responsibility for the subject had passed to the Scottish Executive.

National Air Traffic Services

28. **Mr. Moore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has made to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the future of National Air Traffic Services; and if he will make a statement. [96373]

Dr. Reid: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is fully aware that the Scotland Office supports the Government's commitment to maintaining, and improving wherever necessary, some of the most stringent aviation safety standards in the world. We also support the public/private partnership which will ensure the separation of safety regulation from the provision of air traffic control services. The Government's commitment to the New Scottish Centre at Prestwick is secure through the partnership arrangements.

Oil and Gas Industry

29. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has made to the oil and gas industry task force; and if he will make a statement. [96374]

Mr. Wilson: I participated in the most recent meeting of the Oil and Gas Task Force on 5 October, and expect to attend the last meeting of the Task Force in its current form, which is due to be held in early December. I am taking a very close interest in the oil industry and its service sector because we believe that it will continue to be enormously important to the UK economy for many years to come. We wish to see the industry and Government continue to work in partnership, with the objective being the maintenance of a vital UK Continental Shelf and the recognition of the UK as a world centre for the global oil and gas business.

Food Safety

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the steps being taken by the United Kingdom Government to improve food safety in Scotland. [96369]

Mr. Wilson: The UK Government are working with the devolved authorities to implement a UK-wide Food Standards Agency. Food safety is a devolved matter and the Agency will provide, through its Scottish arm, advice to the Scottish Executive.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what methods of depreciation his Department will apply in the current financial year to fixed assets in the preparation of departmental resource accounting balance sheets. [97040]

Dr. Reid: Freehold land is not depreciated. Depreciation on other tangible fixed assets will be provided using the straight line method. This is in accordance with the Treasury's Resource Accounting Manual and Financial Reporting Standard 15 "Tangible Fixed Assets" issued by the Accounting Standards Board.

Entertainments Budget

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the entertainments budget for his Department since June in total; and if he will list the Scottish organisations he has met since June. [96717]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 3 November 1999]:* From 1 July to 31 October the Scotland Office has spent £80 on official entertainment. I and my ministerial colleagues have met a number of organisations representing a wide range of Scottish interests.

Coal Industry

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last had meetings with representatives of the Scottish opencast coal industry; and what issues were discussed. [R] [97682]

Mr. Wilson: I met with Mr. Campbell Christie, a Director of The Scottish Coal Company Ltd, on 12 October 1999 to discuss transport of coal by rail.

TREASURY

Medical Equipment (VAT)

Dr. Brand: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received relating to the differences in treatment for VAT between medical appliances donated to hospitals for named patients and the same items donated to hospital wards. [96448]

Dawn Primarolo: No representations have been received relating to differences in treatment for VAT between medical appliances donated to named patients or to hospital wards. This is because the VAT treatment of goods donated to an NHS hospital is the same whether the goods are for a ward or named patient.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will assess the advantages and disadvantages of exempting patient participation groups from VAT on their purchases of medical equipment; [97260]

(2) for what reasons some charitable bodies are exempt from VAT on medical equipment and others are not. [97261]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* There is VAT relief for medical equipment bought by charitable patient participation groups when it is donated to National Health Service bodies, charity run hospitals and research institutions operating on a not for profit basis, first aid or rescue charities or charities providing care to disabled people. This relief benefits public and charitable health care providers. There is no scope to extend VAT relief to medical equipment bought by patient participation groups for any other purpose.

New Jobs (Pay Rates)

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what information his Department collates on the rates of pay of new jobs as a proportion of average earnings; [96237]

(2) what proportion of new jobs pay *(a)* below half average earnings, *(b)* from half average earnings up to average earnings, *(c)* from average earnings to twice average earnings and from *(d)* twice average earnings to five times average earnings and above for a convenient period for which he has data. [96236]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 9 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions about the earnings of people in new jobs.

The ONS is not able to identify people in newly created jobs. However, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) does collect data on the earnings of employees and on the length of time people have worked for their current employer. LFS estimates of the distribution of the hourly earnings of those who recently joined their employer relative to the average for all employees are shown in the attached table.

Data for those earning more than five times average hourly earnings have been combined with that for two to five times average earnings because the sample size in the former group is too small for the estimate to be shown separately. The distribution for all employees is also shown. We cannot know how many of these jobs in the former group are newly created and it would be difficult to collect such information reliably from a household survey such as the LFS. Nor does the New Earnings Survey ask employers whether a job is newly created.

Distribution of employees earnings [1] by when they started with their current employer
United Kingdom, spring 1999, not seasonally adjusted

Pay band	*Employees who started with their current employer less than 3 months ago [2]*	*Per cent. All employees*
Less than half of average earnings (Less than £4.07)	38	18
From half average earnings up to average earnings (£4.07 to less than £8.14)	46	46
From average earnings to twice average earnings (£8.14 to less than £16.28)	13	30
Two or more times average earnings (£16.28 or more)	3	7
All employees (thousands = 100%)[3]	1,160	23,680

[1] The LFS estimate of average hourly earnings for all employees in spring 1999 was £8.14. LFS hourly earnings estimates exclude employees earning £100 per hour or more.
[2] Employees who said that they started working continuously for their employer in the current month or the two previous calendar months.
[3] Excludes employees who did not give a valid response regarding their hourly earnings.
Source:
ONS, Labour Force Survey

Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of changes in the definition of employment for self-employed contractors contained in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill; and on what basis he has calculated the effect of such changes to the status of employment. [97112]

Dawn Primarolo: Our assumption is that the number of workers covered by the normal employment status tests will not be significantly different from the number which would have been covered by the "control" test, though the population is likely to be different. Any variation would be within the margin of error of the original estimate. The revised Regulatory Impact Assessment published in

October, a copy of which is placed in the Library, sets out the likely impact of the changes we announced on 23 September.

Expatriate Scots (England)

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of Scots who have been resident in England in each of the last five years. [97369]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Jim Murphy, dated 9 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking what estimates have been made of the number of Scots who have been resident in England in each of the last five years.

The ONS is not able to make estimates of the number of Scots resident in England.

Young People (Employment)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what data he has collated concerning the numbers of 18 to 25 year olds moving from the North to the South of England to seek employment; and if he will make a statement. [97572]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Pike, dated 9 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question about young people moving from the North to the South of England to seek employment.

The ONS does not collect information on the reasons why people move from one area of England to another. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) does collect information on people's region of residence and employment status, both current and a year ago. One might infer that people who had not been in employment and who had moved and were either employed or actively seeking and available for work a year later may have moved in order to seek employment. However, LFS estimates for the geographies and age group specified are below the LFS release threshold. This release threshold (10,000 for one quarter's LFS data) arises because, like any other sample survey, the LFS is subject to sampling variability. Numbers below the threshold are not considered sufficiently reliable to release.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Inland Revenue's Departmental Expenditure Limit and running costs limit for 1999–2000. [97919]

Dawn Primarolo: Subject to parliamentary approval of the Supplementary Estimates for Class XVI, Votes 4 and 5 (Inland Revenue and Valuation Office Agency) the Inland Revenue Departmental Expenditure Limit for 1999–2000 will be increased by £297,235,000 from £1,871,226,000 to £2,168,461,000. The Inland Revenue running cost limit will also be increased by £28,351,000 from £2,140,489,000 to £2,168,840,000.

The increase is due to the transfer to the Inland Revenue of the Contributions Agency and the National Insurance Fund funded by transfers from DSS and DHSS(NI) and the take up of end year flexibility of £950,000 by the Valuation Office.

The increase will be offset by transfers or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not add therefore to the planned total of public expenditure.

Pensions (Tax Treatment)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure equal tax treatment of contributions to state and occupational pension schemes. [97619]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax relief is given on contributions for occupational and personal pension schemes to encourage people to make pension provision for their retirement. Adopting the same treatment on contributions for state pensions would result in a significant loss to the Exchequer which would have to be made good by an increase in the rate of taxation, or by corresponding reductions in other tax allowances.

Enterprise Investment Schemes

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many enterprise investment schemes were undertaken in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998. [97717]

Dawn Primarolo: Available information on the number of small unquoted companies raising money by issuing shares under the Enterprise Investment Scheme, and the number and amount of subscriptions, are shown in the table. The table is based on company returns received up to July 1999. However, because of time lags in the receipt of claims, figures for more recent years are less complete than for earlier years. In particular, information for 1998–99 gives a very partial picture.

Enterprise Investment Scheme: companies, subscriptions and amount invested

Year	Number of companies	Number of subscriptions	Amount (£ million)
1996–97	643	8,765	59.6
1997–98	615	10,305	56.7
1998–99	464	8,192	40.5

EC Goods

Dr. Brand: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those goods legally available in other European Community countries which cannot be brought into the United Kingdom. [97647]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that this information, which would require detailed comparison of relevant UK legislation with that of all other Member States, is not available.

Official Engagements

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his official engagements were between 3.30 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Wednesday 3 November. [97749]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* I had meetings at the Treasury and visited the London Stock Exchange to launch Techmark, the London Stock Exchange's new technology market. At 7 p.m. I voted in the division following the debate on Lords Amendment 42 to the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

Personal Service Companies

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals trading as personal service companies are currently *(a)* on contract to HM Treasury, *(b)* on contract to the Inland Revenue and *(c)* employed by EDS in pursuance of their contractual obligations to the Inland Revenue. [97295]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* It is not possible to say how many individuals trading as personal service companies are currently on contract to *(a)* HM Treasury, *(b)* the Inland Revenue or employed by EDS in pursuance of their contractual obligations to the Inland Revenue.

Gold

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how, and under whose authority, the London gold bullion market is supervised; and what reporting requirements exist in gold bullion trades to prevent the manipulation of the gold market. [97394]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The London bullion market is regulated by the Financial Services Authority in accordance with the principles of the London Code of Conduct. The Code sets out general standards of behaviour and conduct, and appropriate systems and controls, for market participants to adopt when transacting business in gold. The Code also sets out procedures to be followed should there be complaints about non-compliance.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedure was followed to sell gold from Britain's reserves. [97395]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* As announced on 7 May 1999 the sale of part of the United Kingdom's gold holdings will be through a programme of five auctions in 1999–2000. The Information Memorandum, issued by the Bank of England on behalf of HM Treasury, details the arrangements and terms and conditions for the auctions in 1999–2000.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the official gold reserves expressed in tonnes of *(a)* Germany, *(b)* France and *(c)* Italy; and what will be the gold reserves expressed in tonnes of the United Kingdom after the completion of the gold sales programme announced on 7 May. [97396]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Figures on the gold holdings of other countries can be found in the IMF's International Financial Statistics. Over the medium term the Government are planning to reduce their gold holdings to around 300 tonnes.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the United Kingdom would continue to *(a)* own and *(b)* control its gold reserves if Britain were to join the single European currency after January 2002. [97393]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* If the United Kingdom joined stage 3 of Economic and Monetary Union the provisions of Article 31 of the Statute of the European System of Central Banks (Protocol No. 3 to the EU Treaty) would apply.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultation took place with other Governments and central banks prior to the announcement on 7 May about the sale of the United Kingdom's gold reserve. [97397]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) on 13 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *184*.

Tax Documents

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish the next Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs document; and if he will make a statement. [98160]

Dawn Primarolo: The Treasury will today be publishing a booklet containing the estimate of the effects of various illustrative tax changes on tax receipts in 2000–01 and 2001–02 (plus 2002–03 for indirect taxes) and estimates of the costs of the main tax reliefs in 1998–99 and 1999–2000. Copies are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Income Tax

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what head voluntary contributions to HM Treasury as a supplement to income tax are classified; and how much was received under this head in the last financial year. [97493]

Dawn Primarolo: Voluntary contributions as a supplement to income tax are included in the published figures for income tax receipts. Reliable figures for this sub-category are not readily available.

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the amount of income tax paid was per resident taxpayer in each county in England for the latest year for which data are available. [96412]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest available estimates of income taxpayer numbers and the average income and income tax liability by region and county are published in Table 3.13 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1999" which is available in the Library of the House.

Household Incomes

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average gross weekly household income was for each county in England for the latest year for which data are available. [96413]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Michael J. Foster, dated 9 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on average gross weekly household income for each county in England, for the latest available year.

The latest figures published by the ONS for household income by *county* are for 1995 and were published in Table 9 of "Regional Accounts 1995: part 2, Economic Trends no. 535, June 1998". Estimates for household income by *region*, up to 1997, were published in "Regional Accounts 1997: part 2, Economic Trends no. 551, October 1999". Both of these publications are available in the House of Commons Library. *Sub-regional* estimates of household income in the future will be based on different geographies, owing largely to the reorganisation of local government throughout Great Britain. The first estimates on this basis will be published in the first half of 2000, and will include data for more recent years.

The figures available relate to the income of the household sector, as defined for the purposes of national and regional accounts. In addition to private households, this includes charities, voluntary and other non-profit organisations, and quasi-corporations.

The published figures are normally presented in terms of total annual household income per head of population. The 1995 total income estimates figures, converted to weekly averages for all English counties, are given in the attached table.

Total household income per head by county, 1995	*£ per head per week*
Avon	190
Bedfordshire	209
Berkshire	237
Buckinghamshire	238
Cambridgeshire	210
Cheshire	201
Cleveland	169
Cornwall	183
Cumbria	190
Derbyshire	179
Devon	187
Dorset	201
Durham	171
East Sussex	207
Essex	212
Gloucestershire	207
Greater Manchester	175
Hampshire	210
Hereford and Worcester	200
Hertfordshire	239
Humberside	177
Isle of Wight	189
Kent	203
Lancashire	176
Leicestershire	189
Lincolnshire	199
London	233
Merseyside	170
Norfolk	193
Northamptonshire	197
Northumberland	201
North Yorkshire	219
Nottinghamshire	179
Oxfordshire	219
Shropshire	197
Somerset	196
South Yorkshire	167
Staffordshire	186
Suffolk	191
Surrey	251
Tyne & Wear	163
Warwickshire	210
West Midlands	172
West Sussex	219
West Yorkshire	179
Wiltshire	225

Source:
Regional Accounts part 2, Table 9, Economic trends no. 535, June 1998

Departmental Assets

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the value of *(a)* fixed assets, property and land and *(b)* moveable assets owned by the Government and its agencies (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in Scotland. [97296]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Office for National Statistics recently estimated the market value of United Kingdom public sector, tangible, non-financial assets at 31 December 1998 to be £483.3 billion. Of this, £450.3 billion represents land and property and £33 billion represents movable assets (including stocks). These estimates are published in the November edition of Economic Trends (pages 53–68). The figures are provisional and not yet formally part of the National Accounts but updated numbers are expected to be published in the 2000 edition of the National Accounts Blue Book. Separate figures for Scotland are not available.

In addition, the National Asset Register, published in November 1997, lists all central government owned assets by Department, including the then Scottish Office, without valuations. Departments are preparing balance sheets as part of the move to Resource Accounting and Budgeting.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Class Sizes

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils in Key Stage 2 were in classes of 41 or more taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools *(a)* on 1 May 1997 and *(b)* according to the most recent available figures. [94923]

Ms Estelle Morris: We do not have information for May 1997 but in January 1997 there were 1,020 pupils in Key Stage 2 in classes of 41 or more, in January 1998 there were 2,390, and in January 1999 there were 1,690. Primary class sizes, including those at Key Stage 2, rose consistently under the previous administration from 1988 to 1998, reflecting the spending decisions and priorities of the time. Between January 1998 and January 1999, reflecting the first budget of this administration, the number of primary pupils in classes over 30 fell from 1,411,366 to 1,278,607 and new figures for Key Stage 1 will be published shortly. The proportion of children in Key Stage 2 classes over 30 fell from 40 per cent. to 39 per cent. between January 1998 and January 1999. This information was published in the statistical volume "Statistics of Education Schools in England" earlier this year, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the local education authorities with pupils in classes of 41 or more taught by one teacher *(a)* in maintained secondary schools and *(b)* in Key Stage 2 in maintained primary schools, indicating how many such pupils there are in each case. [94926]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available information is shown in the tables.

Number of pupils in maintained secondary schools of size 41 or more taught by one teacher, January 1999

LEA	Number of pupils
Blackpool	41
Bradford	41
Durham	41
Nottinghamshire	41
City of Bristol	42
Manchester	42
Northumberland	42
City of Plymouth	44
Lincolnshire	45
Warwickshire	45
Windsor and Maidenhead	45
Wigan	48
Redbridge	51
Bolton	56
Gloucestershire	57
Milton Keynes	57
Wolverhampton	64
Wiltshire	66
Bracknell Forest	78
Hertfordshire	78
Leicestershire	99
Herefordshire	129
Kent	153
Cumbria	175
England	1,580

Number of pupils in Key Stage 2 classes of size 41 or more taught by one teacher, January 1999

LEA	Number of pupils
Blackburn with Darwen	41
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	41
City of Nottingham	41
Derby	41
East Riding of Yorkshire	41
Leicestershire	41
North East Lincolnshire	41
Northumberland	41
Oldham	41
Sefton	41
Staffordshire	41
Stockport	41
Cambridgeshire	42
Hertfordshire	42
Nottinghamshire	42
Wiltshire	42
Devon	43
Norfolk	43
Wirral	43
Havering	54
Bolton	83
Dorset	83
St. Helens	83
Halton	87
Lancashire	124
Derbyshire	387
England	1,690

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many pupils were in classes of 41 or more taught by one teacher in maintained secondary schools *(a)* on 1 May 1997 and *(b)* according to the most recent available figures; [94925]

(2) how many pupils were in classes of 31 or more pupils taught by one teacher in maintained schools *(a)* on 1 May 1997 and *(b)* on the latest date for which figures are available. [95328]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have published the following information on numbers of pupils in maintained schools in England taught by one teacher in classes of over 31 pupils and of over 41 in the statistical volume "Statistics of Education Schools in England", copies of which have been placed in the Library. We do not have information for May 1997, so we have given in the table the position in both January 1997 and January 1998. Primary and secondary class sizes rose consistently under the previous Administration from 1988 to 1998, reflecting the spending decisions and priorities of the time. The fall in the number of pupils in large classes in 1999 follows the first budget of this Administration.

Year	Number pupils in secondary schools in classes of 41	Number pupils in classes of 31 in primary and secondary schools
1997	470	1,589,651
1998	1,630	1,693,999
1999	1,580	1,591,581

The average secondary class remains 6 smaller than the average primary class. Most secondary classes are subject related and these figures do not reflect the varied size of different sets and subject related classes. The Government, in line with Ofsted evidence and most experts, believe that they should concentrate resources on reducing infant class sizes where the numbers in classes over 30 are expected to have fallen from 477,000 in 1997 to below 200,000 in September 1999.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils were taught in classes of 41 or more in nursery classes *(a)* on 1 May 1997 and *(b)* according to the most recent figures available. [94927]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested for May 1997 is not available. In 1999, there were a total of 309 pupils in nursery classes of 41 or more where the Annual School Census reported there was one teacher and no other adult. In all cases, they were involved in activities such as PE, games, drama, music, watching TV or listening to the radio. There were no cases of normal nursery classes with a single teacher in charge of more than 40 pupils.

The information in the following table sets out the child:adult ratio for all nursery classes with one teacher for 1997, 1998 and 1999.

Year	Child:adult ratio for all nursery classes with one teacher
1997	11.4
1998	11.3
1999	11.3

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his letter of 27 October to the hon. Member for Hertsmere on infant class sizes, if he will break down the figure of 6,000 extra teachers according to type of school indicating the overall net change in the number of teachers taking account of teachers who leave the profession. [96771]

Ms Estelle Morris: Revenue grant is allocated to Local Education Authorities on condition that it is used to employ the additional teachers set out in their approved class size plans. It is for LEAs, in consultation with their schools, to draw up their plans and to determine exactly how they should be implemented. We do not therefore hold precise information breaking down the additional teachers by type of school, but approximately 60 per cent. of teachers will be employed in Community schools, 25 per cent. in VA schools, 2 per cent. in Foundation schools and the remainder in VC schools: broadly in line with the number of primary schools in each category.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer of 3 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *201*, on class sizes in primary schools, what factors underlay his decision to restrict the collection of data to classes for five, six and seven-year-olds. [97932]

Ms Estelle Morris: The September Class Size Count is designed specifically to monitor the implementation of our Infant Class Size Pledge. It also keeps to a minimum any data collection burden placed on schools and local education authorities at a very busy time of year for them.

Good quality monitoring information is essential to the effective implementation of the Pledge, to ensure that local education authorities are carrying out their class size plans as agreed, to enable the Government to support local education authorities effectively as they do so, to inform the allocation of funding and to help to ensure that good value for public funds is achieved. The results of the count also enable us to take further action quickly at the start of the school year to promote the implementation of the pledge, if this is necessary. Since more comprehensive information from the Annual School Census is not generally available until April, it does not serve these immediate purposes.

Partly as a result of effective monitoring of the pledge, the Government is on target to achieve its target that no 5, 6 or 7 year old should be in an infant class of more than 30 children in virtually all schools by September 2000—18 months ahead of schedule. This September, there were 181,000 children in large infant classes, as compared to 354,000 in September 1998.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he plans to answer the questions of 21 October from the hon. Member for Hertsmere regarding nursery class sizes, secondary school class sizes of 41 or more, classes of 31 or more in maintained schools and lists of local education authorities with classes of over 41 at Key Stage 2 and secondary level. [97885]

Ms Estelle Morris: Replies to all of these questions have been given today, at columns *518-522*.

Departmental Estate

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish a list of assets sold by his Department and their value, by item, in each year since 1991–92; and if he will estimate the value of sales planned for *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [95645]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The publication of a list of assets sold by the Department and their value, by item in each year since 1991–92 cannot be supplied except at a disproportionate cost to the Department. We can however supply details of total value of asset by type from 1991–92 to 1996–97 and the latter part of 1998–99 (see Table 1). Details for 1997–98 and 1998–99 up to December 1998 were given in the reply by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) on 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *278–81*.

The estimate of the value of sales planned for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is shown in Table 2. Tables 1 and 2 set out the information for the Department and exclude non departmental public bodies and local education authorities.

Table 1

£000

Year and organisation	*Type of asset*	*Value of asset*
1991–92		
Department for Education and Employment	Proceeds of sale of Royal College of Art properties, re-invested in rationalisation of college accommodation	506
	Principally proceeds of sale of Liverpool City Technology College Land	655
	National Dock Labour Board Surplus Properties	520
	Other properties	170
	Skills Training Agency Asset disposals principally property	6,674
Total		8,525
Employment Service	Principally land and buildings	5,140
Total		5,140
1992–93		
Department for Education and Employment	Skills Training Agency Asset disposals, principally property	343
	Land and buildings	1,178
	Other surplus assets	760
Total		2,281

Table 1

£000

Year and organisation	*Type of asset*	*Value of asset*
Employment Service	Principally land and buildings	3,436
	Other surplus assets	966
Total		4,402
1993–94		
Department for Education and Employment	STA properties	240
	Sale of land following withdrawal of City Technology College proposals	1,592
	Other surplus assets	12
Total		1,844
Employment Service	Principally land and buildings	5,641
	Other surplus assets	1,573
Total		7,214
1994–95		
Department for Education and Employment	STA properties	1,441
Total		1,441
Employment Service	Principally land and buildings	7,329
	Other surplus assets	2,343
		9,672
1995–96		
Department for Education and Employment	STA properties	5,521
Total		5,521
Employment Service	Principally land and buildings	3,404
	Other surplus assets	1,667
Total		5,071
1996–97		
Department for Education and Employment	Property	102
	Other surplus assets	404
Total		506
January 1999-March 1999		
Department for Education and Employment	No additional sales	
January 1999-March 1999		
Employment Service	Land and buildings	170
	Vehicles	938
Total		1,108

Notes:
1. Asset details for 1997–98 published on 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *278–81*.
2. Asset details for 1998–99 (April to December 1998) published on 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *278–81*.

Table 2

£000

Year and organisation	*Type of asset*	*Estimated value of asset*
(a) 1999–2000		
Department for Education and Employment/Employment Service	Freehold Property	4,700
	Vehicles, Office Machinery, Fixture and Fitting	1,353
Total		6,053
(b) 2000–01		
Department for Education and Employment/Employment Service	Freehold Property	4,150
	Vehicles, Office Machinery, Fixture and Fittings	1,403
Total		5,553

Remploy

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the dates and venues of visits made to Remploy factories by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary. [96766]

Ms Hodge: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment visited the Barking Remploy factory on 26 March 1999 and the Southampton Remploy factory on 10 May 1999. When she was at Southampton the Minister also met Remploy Interwork employees at their placements. In addition she has visited the Newco factory in Central London which provides supported employment for disabled people. She also receives regular feedback from senior Employment Service officials on their factory visits.

Sex Education

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his policy on teaching five-year-olds about homosexual practices. [97101]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government do not believe such lessons are appropriate for five-year-olds.

Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what analysis his Department has undertaken of the impact of decisions by the Teacher Training Agency to withdraw funding from teacher training institutions on the number of primary and secondary school teachers completing initial teacher training courses; and if he will make a statement. [97269]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) withdraws accreditation from teacher training institutions whose quality is judged by Ofsted to be unsatisfactory. Where this happens, the training places and funding are withdrawn and reallocated to high quality providers. Therefore, there should be no reduction in the number of trainees in the system as a whole, and no impact on overall numbers of primary and secondary teachers completing initial teacher training courses. The work of the TTA in improving the quality of initial teacher training is crucial to the Government's standards agenda.

Primary Pupils (Spending)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answers of 16 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *381*, and 1 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *245*, on primary school pupils, if he will list the money spent per primary age pupil *(a)* from local education authorities, *(b)* from central Government and *(c)* in total in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99 for each local education authority ranked in descending order of total spend. [97646]

Ms Estelle Morris: In my reply to my hon. Friend's earlier questions to which he refers I explained that information for 1998–99 in the form in which it was requested was not yet available, and the situation is still unchanged. I will write to my hon. Friend when the figures he requests are available, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what appeal procedures will be available to teachers who are dissatisfied with their assessment under performance-related pay. [97937]

Ms Estelle Morris: Under the proposed arrangements for the new performance threshold, heads would assess teachers against the threshold standards. Accredited external assessors would work with heads to ensure national consistency. There will be no appeals against individual threshold decisions, but unsuccessful teachers will be able to re-apply each year.

It is envisaged that headteachers would be responsible for reviewing the outcomes of teachers' annual performance reviews, and that where governing bodies make decisions about discretionary pay awards to teachers, these would be informed by the outcome of performance reviews. The governing body would continue to have statutory responsibility for pay decisions and it is envisaged that appeals will continue to be dealt with under schools' grievance procedures.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which measures of classroom teachers' performance in assessment for performance-related pay do not relate to attainment by pupils. [97930]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently consulting on the detail of the new performance review arrangements, including the agreeing of objectives for classroom teachers. We are proposing that teacher objectives should cover pupil progress and ways of improving teachers' professional practice, including professional development. Objectives would be internal, individual and agreed with teach leaders to reflect the particular circumstances of each school. Where governing bodies make decisions about discretionary pay awards to teachers, these would be informed by the outcome of performance reviews.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of the annual cost of administering performance-related pay. [97936]

Ms Estelle Morris: The draft Performance Management Framework builds on existing good practice in schools, reinforcing current monitoring and evaluation work, and giving headteachers and line managers the tools to manage their staff effectively. Once implemented, the new arrangements will be an integral part of the management of schools. Headteachers, in common with teachers and governors, will be supported through training and guidance in all elements of the operation of the new arrangements. £20 million will be available to schools via the Standards Fund Performance Management and Threshold Training Grant to support their individual training needs. The Government are also considering arrangements for other aspects of ensuring quality such as advisers to governing bodies on heads' review and assessors for the proposed performance threshold.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his most recent estimate of the number of teachers who will pass through the threshold assessment for performance-related pay. [97935]

Ms Estelle Morris: It is for teachers to decide whether to apply for the performance threshold. 250,000 teachers will be eligible to apply to cross the threshold at its inception next year. An additional 20,000 teachers are expected to become eligible to apply in each subsequent year. We have no set expectations of the numbers but we have made it clear that there is no quota. Over time we expect a majority of teachers to cross the threshold.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to make additional funding available to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* individual schools with an above average number of teachers achieving threshold success following the implementation of performance-related pay. [97931]

Ms Estelle Morris: We will establish a Special Grant to target resources for the performance threshold separate from schools' delegated budgets. All teachers assessed as meeting the national threshold standards will gain an immediate salary increase and access to an upper pay spine. Schools will be able to draw extra funds from the Special Grant via their local education authority for each teacher promoted through the threshold to the upper pay spine.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effect on education spending of introducing performance-related pay over *(a)* the next three years, *(b)* the next five years and *(c)* the next ten years. [97934]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government have announced an extra £1 billion to meet the costs of implementing the Green Paper proposals between 2000–01 and 2001–02. Future levels of funding are a matter for decision thereafter.

ICT

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those firms approved as registered providers of ICT to schools under the National Grid for Learning. [97771]

Mr. Wills: *[holding reply 8 November 1999]:* There is no register of firms qualified to provide ICT to schools under the National Grid for Learning. There is a list of NGfL Certified Managed Service Providers who have been awarded Framework Contracts by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTa) for the supply of managed information system services to a wide range of educational bodies. These are:

Akhter Computers Ltd.
Bull Information Systems Ltd.
Centerprise International Ltd.
Clifton Reed Consultants Ltd.
Comtec Business Systems Ltd.
EIS Kent
Elonex Plc.
Hugh Symons Group Plc.
IBM United Kingdom Ltd.
Research Machines Plc.
Apple Xemplar Education Ltd.
XMA Ltd.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the criteria used to determine which firms qualify to be registered providers of ICT in schools under the National Grid for Learning. [97772]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* There is no register of firms qualified to provide ICT to schools under the National Grid for Learning. There is a list of NGfL Certified Managed Service Providers who have been awarded Framework Contracts by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTa) for the supply of managed information system services to a wide range of educational bodies.

The process of awarding these contracts was as follows:

Advertising

In accordance with the United Kingdom Public Services Contracts Regulations a Tender Notice was placed in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

Invitation to Tender

The criteria used to select firms to be invited to tender from amongst those submitting a Request to Participate are Economic and Financial Standing and Technical Ability.

Tendering

Suppliers submit tenders in response to a statement of requirements which includes minimum technical and service specifications.

Testing of Sample Services

Suppliers whose tenders appear to meet the minimum requirements are invited to submit Sample Services for testing.

Supplier Selection

The criteria for selection for award of a framework contract are the most Economically Advantageous Tenders in terms of Price, Quality, Aesthetics and Functionality, Technical Merit, Technical Back-up, After-sales Service, Running Costs and Delivery.

BECTa is running a competition with a view to awarding further contacts on the basis of broadly the same criteria.

Advanced Skills Teachers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much funding has been available through the Standards Fund for the provision of advanced skills teachers in each year since its inception. [97857]

Ms Estelle Morris: Funding available through the Standards Fund for the provision of Advanced Skills Teachers was £1.3 million in 1998–99, the first year of the new grade, and £11 million in 1999–2000. These figures include both Local Education Authority and DfEE contributions.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many advanced skills teachers are paid *(a)* more than £36,000, *(b)* more than £38,000 and *(c)* £40,000 per annum. [97846]

Ms Estelle Morris: Salaries for Advanced Skills Teachers are determined by the relevant body in accordance with the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1999. Statistical information about the salaries of Advanced Skills Teachers is not held centrally.

Reading Ages

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current proportion

of 11-year-olds achieving a reading age appropriate to their age *(a)* in the last year for which figures are available and *(b)* two years ago in (i) England, (ii) the North West Region and (iii) Bolton. [97909]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department does not currently collect data on pupils' reading age.

The Department collects Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test results (for pupils aged 11 years old) in English, including the results of a reading test. The expected level of attainment of 11-year-olds at the end of Key Stage 2 is level 4.

The proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above in the Key Stage 2 English reading tests was:

in 1999: 81 per cent. for England, 81 per cent. for the North West Region and 81 per cent. for Bolton;

in 1997: 67 per cent. for England, 66 per cent. for the North West Region and 67 per cent. for Bolton.

School Inspections

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the number of school inspections carried out and the average cost of school inspections in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools for each of the last five years. [97095]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Teachers' Employment Rights

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the rights to protection against unfair dismissal enjoyed by head teachers and the legislation in which those rights are enshrined. [97093]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Head teachers who have completed one year's service with their employer enjoy the same rights to protection against unfair dismissal as employees with a similar length of service in the vast majority of occupations. These rights are enshrined in the Employment Rights Act 1996. In addition head teachers, along with other school staff, enjoy a further statutory protection under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and the Education (School Government) (England) Regulations 1999. These provide for the governing body of a maintained school to make arrangements for giving any person whom they propose to dismiss an opportunity of making representations to a committee of governors taking the decision, and to afford an opportunity of appealing against a dismissal decision to a separate committee of governors.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of international examples of best practice with regard to teachers' employment rights; and what examples exist of teachers being subject to dismissal by bodies or individuals other than their employers. [97094]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made no separate assessment of international best practice with regard to teachers' employment rights. Teachers are subject to the same framework of employment rights as employees generally, and it would not be sensible to assess teachers' rights in isolation.

Teachers are community, community special and voluntary controlled schools are subject to dismissal by their local education authority on the recommendation of the school's governing body. However, governing bodies are accountable to Employment Tribunals for their decisions by virtue of the Education (Modification of Enactments Relating to Employment) Order 1999.

School Admissions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by local education authority *(a)* the number of admission appeals held to date under the current admissions regulations and *(b)* the current number of surplus school places; and if he will make a statement on the continuing role of local education authorities in setting school admissions policies for their areas. [97096]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The current system for dealing with admission appeals began on 1 September, when we also published statutory guidance in the new Code of Practice on School Admission Appeals. The first set of figures for appeals under this system, for the year ending August 2000, will be available in July 2001. The latest available statistics on admission appeals for 1997–98 by Local Education Authority can be found in Statistical First Release 19/1999, Admission Appeals for Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools by Local Education Authority area in England 1997–98, a copy of which is in the Library. Overall, 53,370 admission appeals were heard during the 1997–98 academic year, with 20,316 decided in favour of parents.

Surplus places figures are collected annually providing a summary of the level of surplus as at January of that year. For the position as at January 1998 I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Lorna Fitzsimons) on the 4 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *709–14*. New figures as at January 1999 will be published shortly and copies will be placed in the Library.

Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, the Local Education Authority is the admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools. Foundation and voluntary aided schools are responsible for their own admissions. The Act ensures that admissions authorities consult with each other within the relevant area. Where there are disputes, these are a matter for the Schools Adjudicator rather than the Local Education Authority. The Local Education Authority is required to provide parents with a booklet setting out the details of all the admissions policies of schools in their area in order to help parents choose their preferred school.

Headteachers and Local Education Authorities are encouraged to work together in local admissions forums to discuss admission arrangements and develop a common timetable to assist parents. Many Local Education Authorities have already established Admissions Forums, and many more have plans to do so.

Infant Teachers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers were in post in infant classes in *(a)* January 1998 and *(b)* January 1999. [97757]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* We do not collect information on the number of teachers in post in infant classes.

The available information relates to the number of teachers employed in all classes in maintained primary and nursery schools and is shown in the table.

January each year	*Number of teachers*
1999	200,400
1998	198,400

The figures are derived from the annual return about teachers in service made by local education authorities.

We have provided funding for 4,500 extra teachers from September 1999 to implement our infant class size pledge. Of this number, 1,500 had been funded from September 1998 as well.

WALES

Fireworks

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to restrict the periods of *(a)* display and *(b)* sale of fireworks to the period immediately preceding 5 November and the new Millennium. [97898]

Mr. Paul Murphy: These are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Department of Trade and Industry.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 November 1999

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), has not answered the letters of 5 July, 23 September and 21 October to her from the hon. Member for Totnes regarding meetings between herself and a constituent of the hon. Member for Totnes; and if she will make a statement. [97705]

Ms Hodge: I have replied to the hon. Member's letter of 5 July and his office has been in discussion with my Private Secretary regarding his other correspondence. I will write to him with further details as soon as possible.

Horse Chestnuts

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from local education authorities about the use of horse chestnuts in schools, in relation to the safety of children who suffer from anaphylaxis. [98007]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not received any representations from local education authorities about the use of horse chestnuts in schools and we do not issue specific guidance about horse chestnuts. We have issued, with the Department of Health, joint guidance for schools on "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs" which contains advice on anaphylaxis. Advice is also available on the joint DfEE and Department of Health "Wired For Health" website.

Discretionary Awards (Further Education)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the total amount spent by each local authority on discretionary awards to support access to further education in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000. [97547]

Mr. Wicks: Information for the academic year 1997–98, the latest year for which information is available, is shown in the following table.

Expenditure on further education discretionary awards paid by local education authorities [1] in England and Wales

Academic year 1997–98	*Total expenditure (£000)*
England	
Corporation of London	2.8
Camden	65.5
Greenwich	83.2
Hackney	530.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	117.4
Islington	0.6
Kensington and Chelsea	93.8
Lambeth	[2]—
Lewisham	355.0
Southwark	260.8
Tower Hamlets	708.9
Wandsworth	229.7
City of Westminster	47.1
Barking and Dagenham	673.0
Barnet	47.1
Bexley	117.2
Brent	25.7
Bromley	328.2
Croydon	520.7
Ealing	91.0
Enfield	214.0
Haringey	[2]—
Harrow	[2]—
Havering	155.6
Hillingdon	60.8
Hounslow	94.2
Kingston upon Thames	13.8
Merton	198.3
Newham	607.6
Redbridge	78.9
Richmond upon Thames	121.5
Sutton	47.7
Waltham Forest	246.4
Birmingham	4.3
Coventry	54.4
Dudley	76.5
Sandwell	68.8
Solihull	[2]—
Walsall	5.3
Wolverhampton	[2]—
Knowsley	455.2
Liverpool	774.0
St. Helens	182.3
Sefton	667.0
Wirral	137.8
Bolton	1.4
Bury	56.2
Manchester	987.3
Oldham	455.6
Rochdale	307.0
Salford	27.1
Stockport	24.5
Tameside	396.4
Trafford	32.5
Wigan	174.7
Barnsley	3.9
Doncaster	25.0
Rotherham	171.0
Sheffield	37.3
Bradford	43.1
Calderdale	44.1
Kirklees	1,052.2
Leeds	1,633.1
Wakefield	9.0
Gateshead	157.9
Newcastle upon Tyne	211.3
North Tyneside	88.6
South Tyneside	216.4
Sunderland	54.2
Isles of Scilly	36.1
Bath and North East Somerset	58.7
Bristol City	227.2
North Somerset	136.2
South Gloucestershire	134.7
Bedfordshire	46.5
Luton	221.9
Bracknell Forest	53.6
Windsor and Maidenhead	47.1

Expenditure on further education discretionary awards paid by local education authorities [1] in England and Wales

Academic year 1997–98	*Total expenditure (£000)*
West Berkshire	137.2
Reading[3]	[4]—
Slough[3]	[4]—
Wokingham[3]	[4]—
Buckinghamshire	275.8
Milton Keynes	175.2
Cambridgeshire[5]	202.1
Cheshire	40.3
Halton	24.1
Warrington	20.4
Hartlepool	101.0
Middlesbrough	339.1
Redcar and Cleveland	153.4
Stockton on Tees	135.7
Cornwall	2,072.0
Cumbria	2,122.3
Derbyshire	10.6
City of Derby	3.5
Devon[5]	1,018.4
Dorset	1,185.6
Poole	449.0
Bournemouth	854.9
Durham	400.3
Darlington	1,022.8
East Sussex	1,022.8
Brighton and Hove	293.5
Essex	1,980.2
Southend	338.5
Thurrock	225.4
Gloucestershire	117.2
Hampshire	2,019.1
Portsmouth	742.8
Southampton	530.8
Herefordshire	306.5
Worcestershire	604.7
Hertfordshire	989.1
Hull City	851.0
East Riding	568.9
North East Lincolnshire	223.9
North Lincolnshire	595.0
Isle of Wight	198.6
Kent[5]	1,344.0
Lancashire[5]	3,614.5
Leicestershire	344.4
Leicester City	593.2
Rutland	9.5
Lincolnshire[5]	[4]—
Norfolk	857.0
North Yorkshire	1,014.4
York City	624.2
Northamptonshire	2.0
Northumberland	836.2
Nottinghamshire	664.1
Nottingham City	614.8
Oxfordshire	135.0
Shropshire[5]	398.6
Somerset	1,097.3
Staffordshire	353.8
Stoke-on-Trent	238.7
Suffolk[5]	[3]—
Surrey	1,107.2
Warwickshire	0.7
West Sussex	929.1
Wiltshire	688.4
Swindon	266.2
Wales	
Isle of Anglesey	349.5
Gwynedd[5]	[4]—
Conwy	256.8
Denbighshire	29.8

Expenditure on further education discretionary awards paid by local education authorities [1] in England and Wales

Academic year 1997–98	*Total expenditure (£000)*
Flintshire	150.8
Wrexham	119.9
Powys	[2]—
Ceredigion	32.5
Pembrokeshire	78.5
Carmarthenshire	77.7
City and County of Swansea	16.1
Neath Port Talbot	84.5
Bridgend	45.5
The Vale of Glamorgan	173.1
Rhondda Cynon Taff	479.4
Merthyr Tydfil	21.9
Caerphilly	385.7
Blaenau Gwent	266.8
Torfaen	151.0
Monmouthshire	363.1
Newport	358.7
Cardiff	663.7
Total England and Wales[6]	59,614.5

[1] Paid by local education authorities to students normally domiciled in their area.
[2] Less than £500
[3] Gwynedd, Lincolnshire, Suffolk, Reading, Slough and Wokingham were unable to provide information.
[4] Not available
[5] Data are not available separately for the new LEAs which have replaced the former authorities of Cambridgeshire, Devon, Kent, Lancashire and Shropshire.
[6] Total includes estimates to compensate for missing or partial returns.
Source:
F503G

Further Education Colleges (Greater London)

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was, for every further education college in the Greater London area, for 1998–99 *(a)* the salary level of the college principal, *(b)* the staff numbers, *(c)* the student numbers and *(d)* the college's total budget. [97271]

Mr. Wicks: Data are not yet available for 1998–99. However, the latest available information is shown in the following table.

Staff numbers in Further Education Sector Institutions [1] Greater London 1996–97

Institution name	*Total*
Barking College	863
Barnet College	749
Bexley College	551
Bromley College of Further and Higher Education	563
Capel Manor Horticultural and Environmental Centre	138
Carshalton College	276
Christ the King Sixth Form College	134
City and Islington College	1,169
City Literary Institute	n/a
City of Westminster College	597
College of North East London	1,009
College of North West London	968
Cordwainers College	n/a
Coulsdon College	119
Croydon College	1,017
Ealing Tertiary College	964
Enfield College	560
Greenhill College—Harrow	n/a

Staff numbers in Further Education Sector Institutions [1]
Greater London 1996–97

Institution name	*Total*
Hackney Community College	535
Hammersmith and West London College	569
Havering College of Further and Higher Education	n/a
Havering Sixth Form College	155
Hendon College	585
John Ruskin College	143
Kensington and Chelsea College	n/a
Kingston College	676
Kingsway College	n/a
Lambeth College	668
Lewisham College	924
Leyton Sixth Form College	127
Marine Society College of the Sea	n/a
Mary Ward Centre	879
Merton College	379
Morley College	n/a
Newham College of Further Education	1,252
Newham Sixth Form College	188
Orpington College of Further Education	290
Phoenix College	43
Redbridge College	334
Richmond Adult and Community Centre	540
Richmond upon Thames College	978
Sir George Monoux College	149
South Thames College	1,514
Southgate College	556
Southwark College	651
St. Charles Catholic Sixth Form College	87
St. Dominic's Sixth Form College	82
St. Francis Xavier Sixth Form College	143
Stanmore College	419
Tower Hamlets College	357
Uxbridge College	269
Waltham Forest College	772
Weald College	445
West Thames College	696
Westminster College	n/a
Woodhouse College	85
Woolwich College	425
Workers' Educational Association	n/a
Working Men's College	582
Total number of staff	25,592

[1] This list includes several different college types, i.e. General FE, Tertiary, Sixth Form Colleges, Specialist Colleges (Art & Design or Agricultural/Horticultural and Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs).

n/a = not available

Local Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to establish single local Learning and Skills Councils for Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes; and if he will make a statement. [98035]

Mr. Wicks: On 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 1079, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in the House the boundaries for the proposed Learning and Skills Councils. Across England there will be 47 local Councils, which will operate as arms of the national Council. There will be a single local Council covering Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

Class Sizes

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the cost was of collecting data on infant class sizes in September. [97844]

Ms Estelle Morris: The estimated cost of collecting data on infant class sizes in September is £70,000. This includes the cost of data collection and preparation within the Department and the costs incurred by schools and local education authorities in completing the return.

Photography

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment further to the letter of 30 September from the Minister of State for Education, if he will list the interested parties involved in consultation about the future of A-level photography; and how many consultees were in favour of abolishing A-level photography. [97933]

Mr. Wicks: Photography A-level has not been abolished. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority recommended last year that photography should continue to be offered in the context of A-level art and design rather than as a stand-alone title because of concerns about the range, scope and demand of the existing A-level photography specification. This recommendation—which Ministers have now endorsed—followed extensive consultation with the awarding bodies, which are responsible for developing and offering the qualifications.

I understand that the QCA is currently reviewing the position of photography within the qualifications framework as a whole in consultation with a wide range of interested parties.

New Deal (Disabled People)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many disabled people have so far obtained employment through the New Deal for Disabled People. [97751]

Ms Hodge: The New Deal for Disabled People is at the pilot stage with 22 innovative schemes and 12 personal adviser pilot areas now operational. The pilots are being brought in over time with the first pilots launched last Autumn. During September, 265 people moved into work through the pilots. Since the first innovative schemes and personal adviser pilot areas started the total number of people placed into work to the end of September 1999 is 1,177.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is *(a)* expenditure to date and *(b)* planned expenditure over the next two years on the New Deal for Disabled People. [97775]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 8 November 1999]*: £195 million (£186 million for Great Britain) has been set aside for the New Deal for Disabled People over the lifetime of this Parliament. £5 million has been allocated for innovative schemes; £24 million for 12 personal adviser pilot areas; and £1.6 million to pilot benefit changes. Pilots have started progressively over the last 15 months, and £8 million had been spent by the end of September 1999. We are actively considering what help could be provided nationally taking account of emerging findings from the pilots.

GNVQs

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* considered in connection with the equivalence between GNVQs Intermediate and Advanced qualifications and their GCE counterparts. [97491]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* No specific studies have been carried out. However, evidence from both school and college inspections carried out by Ofsted and the Further Education Funding Council and from work undertaken by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) confirms that GNVQ standards are broadly comparable with standards at equivalent levels of GCSE and A level. The revised GNVQ assessment regime due to be introduced from September 2000 will reinforce that equivalence by strengthening the rigour of the GNVQ at all levels.

Educational Exports

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on recent developments in the field of educational and vocational exports. [97485]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* There have been a number of recent developments in the promotion of UK education and training exports, as part of fulfilling the Government's commitment in the Competitiveness White Paper, to the UK as a knowledge-based economy, including a programme of export promotion visits overseas by my noble Friend the Minister for Education and Employment and the three following initiatives.

The Prime Minister announced in June a strategy to attract an extra 75,000 overseas students to the UK by 2005 through stronger marketing and a better response to international students who might consider study in the UK.

Second, the Government have commissioned a review of British Training International, which was established in November 1997 to promote UK vocational education and training overseas.

Third, the Education and Training Exports Group, which reports to Ministers and brings together representatives of education and training under private sector leadership, is planning a high level conference next year to demonstrate to the leaders of British industry the ways in which education and training can be used as a marketing tool to enhance international business success.

Performance-related Pay (Shropshire)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the estimated cost is of performance-related pay for teachers in Shropshire in 2000–01; and how this will be funded. [98166]

Ms Estelle Morris: Teachers with the maximum nine salary points for qualifications and experience will be entitled to apply for the new performance threshold. The School Teachers' Review Body is currently considering the Government's proposal that all teachers who meet the threshold standards should receive a salary increase of up to £2,000, and have access to a new upper pay spine. There will be no quota of threshold successes at either national or local level. It is not possible therefore to give a total cost for Shropshire in advance; this will depend upon the number of teachers who pass the threshold. We will establish a Special Grant to target resources for the performance threshold separately from schools' delegated budgets. Schools will be able to draw extra funds from the Special Grant via their Local Education Authority for each teacher promoted through the threshold to the upper pay spine.

Education SSA (Shropshire)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage increase in education SSA has been set for Shropshire for the forthcoming financial year. [98164]

Ms Estelle Morris: Details of the proposed education Standard Spending Assessment for the financial year 2000–01 will be announced by the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in late November.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the education SSA is for a pupil of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school age in (i) the London borough of Southwark and (ii) Shropshire. [98163]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows the primary and secondary Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per pupil for the London borough of Southwark and Shropshire county council for 1999–2000.

1999–2000 SSA per pupil

£ per pupil

	Primary	*Secondary*
Southwark	3,396	4,377
Shropshire	2,220	2,837

Sports Scholarships

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many higher and further educational establishments run sports scholarship schemes in the United Kingdom; and if he will list them; [97990]

(2) what is his estimate of the total value in cash terms of sports scholarships in further and higher education per annum; [97991]

(3) how many students participate in sports scholarship schemes in further and higher education. [97994]

Mr. Wicks: The information is not held centrally.

Income Support

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to provide additional assistance to lone parents on income support who wish to progress to higher education. [97409]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The current student support system already provides help to lone parents who decide to enter higher education. Lone

parents are eligible to apply for a student loan; and may receive a means tested grant towards their contribution to tuition fees, which in many cases will be the full £1,025 owed. In addition they can receive dependents' allowances, a single parent's allowance and Child Benefit, all of which are cash grants. Furthermore, lone parents remain eligible for benefits although income from student support is taken into account in assessing the amounts.

However, we recognise that we in moving to full time education some lone parents may be concerned about the additional costs of books, equipment, travel, school meals and child care. In these circumstances Access Funds and Hardship Loans, which are administered by the higher education institutions, are available. Mature students including lone parents in receipt of DSS benefits are a priority for help through Access Funds. An extra £12 million is being put into Access Funds in England this year, specifically to assist mature students, including lone parents. These now total £74.6 million, and have more than trebled since 1997–98. My Department is currently carrying out a Review of the Access Funds and Hardship Loans.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97428]

Mr. Wills: The Department spent the following sums on external consultants and advisers from its running cost budget.

1998–99: £5.211 million

1997–98: £4.543 million

1996–97: £8.216 million

1995–96: £5.072 million.

I shall write to the hon. Member shortly with the figures for consultants and advisers funded from the Department's programme provision and place a copy in the Library.

After-school Clubs

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places in after-school and holiday clubs there were in successful New Opportunities Fund bids up to and including the October 1999 awards broken down by local authority; and what percentage of children aged five to 14 years in each area this represented. [97560]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have been asked to reply.

In the period from 26 July 1999, when the first New Opportunities Fund out of school hours child care places were announced, to the end of October 1999, NOF announced grants totalling £7.3 million for the creation of 24,649 new child care places in 333 schemes spread across 183 local authority areas throughout the UK. I have asked the Chief Executive of the New Opportunities Fund to write directly to my right hon. Friend to provide further details of the precise breakdown of these places by local authority. Copies of his letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Rural Policy

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to ensure co-ordination of the Government's policies affecting rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [98113]

The Prime Minister: I have established a new Cabinet Committee on rural affairs. Its membership and terms of reference are as follows. In addition to the members listed, other Ministers will be invited to attend meetings as and when business requires:

Ministerial Group on Rural Affairs (MISC 8)

Composition

Minister for the Cabinet Office (Chair)

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

Secretary of State for Health

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Terms of Reference

"To co-ordinate the Government's policies affecting Rural Areas".

Advisory Committee on Business Appointments

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Prime Minister if he has received the second report of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments; and if he will make a statement. [98382]

The Prime Minister: The Committee has submitted its second report to me and I have today placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses. Since 1975 the Committee has advised the Prime Minister of the day on the propriety of business appointments that Crown servants wish to take up when they leave Crown service. Following a recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, it now also provides advice directly to former Ministers on their business appointments. The Committee's second report provides an account of their work in 1998–99.

I am very grateful to all the members for giving their time so generously to this important role. I should like to thank in particular the former Chairman, the right hon. the Lord Carlisle of Bucklow QC, who served with distinction for a number of years, as did the right hon. Lord Thomson of Monifieth, General Sir Charles Huxtable and Sir Robin Ibbs. I also join all members of the Committee in paying tribute to Lord Gillmore who died in March.

Homelessness

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has for the appointment of an official to co-ordinate the Government's policies on combating homelessness. [97598]

The Prime Minister: In February 1999, Louise Casey, formerly Deputy Director of Shelter, was appointed as the Director of the Rough Sleepers Unit, established within the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to co-ordinate work across Government on tackling rough sleeping in England. I set out details of the work of the Unit in my answer to my hon. Friend of 8 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *35–36*.

Louise Casey was selected following an open competition and was appointed on a three year fixed term contract as a member of the Senior Civil Service.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has for the parliamentary scrutiny of the Social Exclusion Unit. [96788]

The Prime Minister: The Social Exclusion Unit reports to me, and questions on its remit, resourcing and way of working are addressed to me. Each of the reports produced by the Unit has an action plan and timetable, which identifies a lead Department and Minister responsible for overseeing cross Whitehall implementation. That Minister is accountable to Parliament for the success of the implementation of an individual report.

Tampere Summit

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 19 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 261, what agreement he has reached with participants at the Tampere Summit to draw up a list of action to take against secrecy and illegality in matters related to actual and suspected drug transactions. [96884]

The Prime Minister: As I said in my answer to my hon. Friend on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns *717–18*, we agreed a range of special concrete actions against money laundering at Tampere. We also agreed that drug trafficking should be one of the forms of criminality in respect of which work should be done to define common offences and penalties, in order to ensure that these crimes can be prosecuted effectively in every member state. A copy of the Presidency Conclusions, in which the actions are listed, has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scottish Grand Committee

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what budget has been allocated for Scottish Grand Committee meetings in the next session. [97654]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on 9 November 1999, *Official Report*, columns *463–64*, which explains that there is no single specific budget allocated for the Scottish Grand Committee. The House's Estimates are drawn up on a financial year, not a sessional, basis. The Estimates for the current financial year (1999–2000) include provision for expenditure of £49,800 for standing committees' travel and subsistence.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Jiang Qisheng

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for a representative from the British Embassy in Beijing to be present at the trial of Jiang Qisheng. [97900]

Mr. Battle: Foreign diplomats were unable to attend the trial of Jiang Qisheng on 1 November. The court is now in recess. It is not known when the next session will be held. The Chinese authorities have not allowed diplomats to attend the trials of any dissidents.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking in respect of the decision of the Chinese Government to make Jiang Qisheng stand trial. [97899]

Mr. Battle: I personally raised Jiang Qisheng's case in my talks with the Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and expressed our concerns about his trial and possible sentencing. I will continue to press his case.

Palestine

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to monitor the operation of trade agreements between the European Union and both the Palestine Authority and the PLO; what assessment he has made of the levels of co-operation given by Israel to the implementation of these agreements; and what impact such co-operation has had on Palestine's ability to trade with the EU. [97873]

Mr. Hain: The monitoring of the EC/PLO interim agreement is primarily the responsibility of the European Commission. We are concerned that the agreement should be fully recognised by the Israeli government and that the Palestinians should be able to export and import from the EU within hindrance. We participate in the EU/Israel dialogue on the Palestinian economy, which discusses how the Palestinian capacity to export and import freely can be improved. Israeli co-operation in the implementation of the EC/PLO interim agreement is a very important factor affecting the Palestinians; ability to trade with the EU.

The Philippines

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Philippines Ambassador concerning human rights abuses in Canatuan and the question of indigenous land rights in that area. [97809]

Mr. Battle: We are concerned that the rights and freedoms of indigenous people should be recognised and protected. This is why we participate in discussions on indigenous people within the UN, including the working group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. We supported resolutions on indigenous people at the Commission on Human Rights held in Geneva between 27 March and 30 April this year.

Our Embassy in Manila monitors carefully human rights related issues in the Philippines. We have recently appointed a secondee with an NGO background to our

staff in Manila as part of this work. We will be following closely the Philippine Government's Commission on Human Rights investigation into the Canatuan incident.

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many permits were issued by the Israeli Government to Palestinians for travel from Gaza to *(a)* Israel and *(b)* the West Bank (i) for each of the six months preceding the opening of the Southern Safe Passage and (ii) since the opening of the Southern Safe Passage. [97978]

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary welcomed the opening of the southern safe passage on 25 October and had the opportunity to travel on the route on 26 October. The safe passage will enable thousands of Gazans to travel to the West Bank.

On the first day of operation of the safe passage, 800 people travelled from Gaza to the West Bank and 80 from West Bank to Gaza. A number of Gazans were able to leave the Gaza Strip for the first time in their lives. We do not hold the other details requested.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many housing units in Jewish settlements on the West Bank have been demolished; and how many new housing units in Jewish settlements on the West Bank have been started since 14 October. [97976]

Mr. Hain: On 14 October, the Israeli government and Yesha Council agreed that 12 settlement outposts should be dismantled. This agreement is now being implemented. These settlement outputs are believed not to include any housing units. The Israeli government recently acknowledged that they have issued the tenders for the construction of 1,798 housing units.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the agreement made on 14 October between the Israeli Government and the Yesha Council. [97975]

Mr. Hain: We welcome agreement by the Israeli Government and Yesha Council to dismantle some settlements outposts. The British Government's view remains that settlement activity is illegal under international law and unhelpful in curbing settlements.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on continued house demolitions by the Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem. [97977]

Mr. Hain: We are opposed to all attempts to alter the demographics of East Jerusalem, contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention. We therefore strongly regret the continuation of house demolitions, even though their frequency has declined in recent months. A full stop to this policy would contribute to the confidence between the parties which will be essential at this critical stage in the peace process.

International Criminal Court

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to use Article 124 to opt out of the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court when it ratifies the International Criminal Court Statute. [97882]

Mr. Hain: We have no plans to use Article 124 of the International Criminal Court Statute to opt out of the Court's jurisdiction over war crimes. We hope as few countries as possible will take advantage of this provision.

Bonded Labourers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate his Department has made of the number of bonded labourers working in *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* Nepal. [97997]

Mr. Hain: We are deeply concerned by all cases of bonded labour. Accurate and comprehensive figures for those employed in bonded labour in India, Pakistan and Nepal are not available.

Slavery

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to enforce Article 1 of the United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956. [97999]

Mr. Hain: We urge all countries to ratify the international instruments on outlawing slavery, and to wipe out all forms of slavery, including bonded labour.

Working bilaterally and through organisations such as the International Labour Organisation, the Government provide practical support to those countries working to eliminate the practice of slavery. We also provide help to tackle the poverty which breeds abusive labour practices and to protect the rights of vulnerable groups, such as women and children.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97417]

Mr. Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has spent the following sums on external consultancy and advice during the last four financial years:

1995–96: £17.7 million;
1996–97: £11.8 million;
1997–98: £15.8 million;
1998–99: £14.5 million.

The bulk of FCO consulting expenditure is for technical expertise on capital projects, predominantly on estate related and information technology development at home and overseas.

DEFENCE

Zinc Cadmium Sulphide Trials

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with respect to the proposed independent review of the zinc cadmium

sulphide trials carried out in the UK by the former Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment between 1953 and 1964. [98339]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Professor Peter Lachmann, President of the Academy of Medical Sciences, has agreed to lead an independent review of British trials which used zinc cadmium sulphide as an air movement tracer to assess the vulnerability of the UK to attack by biological weapons. It will concentrate on the question of whether these trials might have had harmful effects on public health. Professor Lachmann is being supported by a small team of experts to assist him. It is intended that this independent review will be completed within the next few months, and that a report will be published and a copy placed in the Library of the House.

Aldermaston

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a decision has been reached on building the Dual Access Hydrodynamic Radiographic Test facility at Aldermaston; and if he will make a statement. [96426]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 10 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if a decision has been reached on building the DAHRT facility at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston and for a statement.

The UK has had a dual axis radiography capability at AWE Aldermaston since 1995. Parts of the facility were purpose built but it also incorporates older equipment and infrastructure. A feasibility study for a new, multi axis, facility is being carried out by AWE at present but no decision has yet been made on whether or not it should be built.

You used the term "DAHRT". The DARHT or Dual Axis Radiographic Hydrodynamic Test Facility is an American facility under construction at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are to be implemented at Aldermaston to replace the practice of storing plutonium and uranium sludge in tanks on-site after 1 January 2000. [96424]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 10 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what measures are to be implemented at the Atomic Weapons Establishment Aldermaston to replace the practice of storing plutonium and uranium sludge in tanks on site after 1 January 2000. This matter falls to me for answer within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

In accordance with Nuclear Installation Inspectorate (NII) requirements, AWE will add no further quantities of sludge to the tanks after December 1999.

They are on course to procure plant which will meet the further NII requirement that wastes currently accumulated should be recovered, treated and stored in immobilised form suitable for long term retention. The NII have set a date of 1 April 2003 for the first tank to be treated, and may well set further targets.

In the meantime and with the NII's agreement, existing holdings of sludges can either remain safely in the tanks, which are bunded and whose integrity is regularly monitored or, in the case of future arisings, can be held within the processing plant.

Friend or Foe System

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of upgrading the Identification Friend or Foe Mk Xa systems to the system Mk XII standard; and how many systems will undergo this upgrade. [97137]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 10 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence on what estimate he has made of the cost of upgrading the Identification Friend or Foe MKXa systems to the system MK XII standard; and how many systems will undergo this upgrade. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

The competition to select an equipment supplier for the Successor Identification Friend or Foe programme is currently underway. Consequently, it could prejudice the Department's negotiating position if the estimated cost of upgrading the Identification Friend or Foe MKXa systems to the system MKXII standard were revealed. This information is therefore withheld in accordance with exception 7 to the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The number of the systems to be upgraded is likely to be in the order of 1000 transponders and 600 interrogators for some forty platform types.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many successor identification Friend or Foe system contracts have been awarded; and what is the total value of these contracts. [97136]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 10 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence on the number and value of the Successor Identification Friend or Foe system contracts. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

Sixty two contracts have been awarded to study the fitting of a Successor Identification Friend or Foe system to a number of platforms. Separately, a contract has been placed for the development, production and installation of a Successor Identification Friend or Foe system on Tornado F3 aircraft fleet. The total value of these contracts amounts to £92M, of which approximately 75% is for Tornado F3 and the remaining 25% for the study work.

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to purchase the Raytheon Systems Ltd. successor identification Friend or Foe system; and what representations he has received with regard to this technology. [97213]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Syd Rapson, dated 10 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence on whether he will make it his policy to purchase the Raytheon Systems Ltd Successor Identification Friend or Foe system; and what representation he has received with regard to this technology. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

We have received bids from Raytheon Systems Ltd and Marconi Avionics into the Successor Identification Friend or Foe equipment supplier competition. The bids are currently being assessed and I am therefore unable to comment further at this stage. However, I can assure you that all the relevant factors will be taken into account in selecting a preferred bidder.

Defence Evaluation Research Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the Defence Evaluation Research Agency public-private partnership. [97237]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* A number of organisations and individuals, including representatives from academia, industry, local government, trade unions, DERA staff, and our international collaborative partners, have responded to the consultation document on the DERA public-private partnership (PPP) published by the Ministry of Defence in May. In addition, there have been a number of formal and informal representations.

As I announced on 26 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *768*, work is continuing on a PPP solution for DERA and key stakeholders will continue to be consulted as this work is taken forward.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what developments there have been in the joint MOD-industry sub-group investigating the Defence Evaluation Research Agency public-private partnership. [97236]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* The National Defence Industries Council sub-group on the DERA public-private partnership was formed to provide a mechanism to enable the Ministry of Defence and industry to understand each other's positions on key issues. Both sides have agreed that the sub-group achieved its remit in the two meetings that were held in July. Further meetings will be arranged if issues arise in the continuing work which warrant specific senior level discussion or resolution. Consultation with industry and others is continuing as we take forward work on the DERA PPP.

Trigat Missiles

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of replacing the Milan 1 ATGW systems with the medium range Trigat missiles. [97875]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Howe to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 10 November 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Medium Range (MR) TRIGAT Anti-Tank Guided Weapon Programme. This matter falls to me for answer within the responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

The MR TRIGAT programme is planned to replace the Milan Anti-Tank Guided Weapons System. The cost of this replacement programme was published in the Major Project Report 1998 as £806 Million; this cost is still in line with our current estimates.

Bright Star 99

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Royal Naval forces were deployed in the Bright Star 99 exercise. [97880]

Mr. Spellar: The following Royal Naval and Royal Marine Units were involved in Exercise Bright Star 99:

HMS Ocean (LPH)
HMS Fearless (LPD)
HMS Cumberland (T22)
HMS Edinburgh (T42)
HMS Herald (Survey vessel)
HMS Penzance (MCMV)
HMS Walney (MCMV)
HMS Quorn (MCMV)
HMS Chiddingfold (MCMV)
RFA Sir Bedivere
RFA Sir Geraint
RFA Sir Percivale
RFA Sir Galahad
RFA Sea Centurion
RFA Olna
RFA Fort Austin
RFA Fort George
Headquarters 3 Commando Brigade RM
Headquarters and Signals Squadron RM
40 Commando Royal Marines
Commando Logistics Regiment Royal Marines
Elements of 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery
Elements of 59 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers
539 Assault Squadron Royal Marines
The Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines from the Commando Training Centre RM Lympstone

Key:

LPH—Landing Platform Helicopter
LPD—Landing Platform Dock
T22—Type 22 Frigate
T42—Type 42 Destroyer
MCMV—Mine Countermeasures Vessel.

Hawk Aircraft (India)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance his Department is giving to British Aerospace in connection with its bid to sell Hawk aircraft to India. [95055]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* British Aerospace has been offering Hawk aircraft for sale to the Indian Government for a number of years, in response to

an Indian Air Force requirement for an advanced jet training aircraft. During this period, the Company has received Government advice and support, co-ordinated by the Defence Export Services Organisation in the Ministry of Defence, whose role it is to provide such assistance to UK industry in accordance with the Government's policy on defence exports.

Young Personnel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received in the last six months on the deployment of under 18-year-old service personnel in combat. [97133]

Mr. Spellar: In the past 6 months there have been 9 parliamentary questions, 70 parliamentary inquiries and an Early Day Motion related to the deployment of personnel who are aged under 18. My Department has also received 85 letters from members of the public on the topic in the same period.

Naval Nuclear Material

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual cost of storing Royal Navy nuclear material at BNFL Sellafield. [97643]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Spent submarine reactor fuel cores represent the only significant Royal Navy nuclear material stored at BNFL Sellafield. At today's prices, the cost of BNFL's storage service in the years 1992 to 1998 has been £0.7m, £1.2m, £1.7m, £2.8m, £2.4m, £1.5m and £1.7m respectively. The annual cost has varied with the amount of spent fuel deposited and routine examination of the spent fuel in 1995 and 1996 to ensure its integrity.

Service Posts (Women)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which posts in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the RAF and *(c)* the Royal Navy women are excluded; what percentage of overall service posts this represents; and if he will make a statement. [97677]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The three Services are wholly committed to maximising career opportunities for women in the Armed Forces. 73 per cent. of posts in the Naval Service, 70 per cent. of posts in the Army and 96 per cent. of posts in the RAF are open to women. In the Naval Service women are excluded from the Royal Marine Commandos; in the Army posts in the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps (including the Household Cavalry) are closed to women; and in the RAF women cannot serve in the RAF Regiment. Additionally in the Royal Navy, women cannot serve in submarines or as mine clearance divers for medical reasons.

Pensions and Compensation Reviews

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* his Department's pensions review and *(b)* his Department's compensation review will be (i) completed, (ii) presented to ministers and (iii) published; and if he will make a statement. [97851]

Mr. Spellar: I am currently considering proposals from the joint MOD and DSS compensation review. The Armed Forces Pension Review is currently in progress and I expect to receive proposals next year.

SA80

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the effectiveness of the SA80 weapon; and if he will make a statement. [94783]

Mr. Kilfoyle *[holding answer 20 October 1999]:* It is our practice to keep the effectiveness of weapon systems under continual review. SA80 is an effective weapon system and is planned to remain in service well into the next century. We are, however, currently investigating potential improvements to the SA80 and I expect to receive recommendations in due course.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97418]

Mr. Kilfoyle: My Department's spending on external consultants over the last four financial years is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1998–99	175.6
1997–98	148.1
1996–97	136.7
1995–96	150.8

Details of expenditure are submitted annually to the Cabinet Office Efficiency and Effectiveness Group and placed in the Library of the House.

We employ a number of individuals in an advisory capacity. Many of these are consultants whose costs will be included in the figures given in the table. We do not hold figures centrally on others employed as advisers and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bonded Labour

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to end the practice of bonded labour. [97998]

Clare Short: The Government made clear their commitment to core labour standards in the White Paper "Eliminating World Poverty". Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour is one of the four core standards established by the International Labour Organisation. We are committed to the promotion of these standards both in the UK and overseas.

We are currently undertaking a strategic review of our approach to the implementation of core labour standards. It will be published later this year. However my Department is already addressing the issue at several levels. At the international level, we are a strong supporter of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Its Declaration and Fundamental principles on the Rights at Work (1998) and Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) both outlaw bonded labour and offer key international standards and monitoring mechanisms. The focus of our support to date has been primarily on

the issue of child labour and the UK is currently the second largest funder of the ILO's International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

Trade Agreements

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will review the effects of existing trade agreements on developing countries, with particular focus on smaller communities and their environment, before the WTO Seattle Conference in November. [97889]

Clare Short: Work by the WTO and the World Bank suggests that the gains to developing countries from the Uruguay Round will have been as large, or larger, relative to income, as the benefits to developed countries. The gains by small states from trade agreements and the effects on their environment vary greatly according to their differing patterns of production and the extent to which they benefit from trade preference schemes.

Initial studies on the possible effects of the new Round identify the potential for considerable benefits for developing countries in agriculture and manufacturing. With regard to the environmental effect of the forthcoming Round, the Government strong support the European Union's Sustainability Impact Assessment. The objectives are to develop a methodology for sustainability impact assessment and to use that methodology to make a broad qualitative assessment of the Round's sustainability impact. The Government will continue to liaise with both the European Commission and the consultants in order to contribute to, and learn from, this work.

At country and regional level, DFID is working with the ILO, national governments, NGOs, trade unions and civil society organisations to promote workers rights. For example in south-east Asia we are supporting the ILO's programme to tackle trafficking in women and children across the region. Women and children are often tied to the commercial sex industry in conditions of bonded labour. We have also provided funds for Christian Aid's programme on bonded Child Labour in India.

We are also funding Anti-Slavery International to provide support to six countries to ratify the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Anti-Slavery International has considerable expert knowledge on the issue of bonded child labour.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to *(a)* review market access for developing countries and *(b)* assess the impact of zero tariffs for agricultural and textile exports from developing to developed countries. [97892]

Clare Short: We are continuing to work within the EU for the best possible access to EU markets for developing countries, in support of our efforts to integrate them into the multilateral trading system. The UK and EU are already committed to providing duty free access for essentially all exports from Least Developed Countries by the end of the next round of multilateral trade negotiations.

My Department is in the process of assessing the effects of further trade liberalisation in agriculture and textiles, including improved market access and reductions in tariffs. Within the context of the next round of trade negotiations, to be launched at Seattle later this month, we will be pushing for reductions in tariff barriers, especially in areas where there are tariff peaks, as for textiles, footwear and leather, and where tariffs escalate as for processed agricultural products.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97422]

Clare Short: In the last four financial years our spending on external consultants and advisers was as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1995–96	1.2
1996–97	0.82
1997–98	1.79
1998–99	1.83

Water Consumption (West Bank and Gaza)

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimates she has made of per capita water consumption by *(a)* Israelis and *(b)* Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. [97874]

Clare Short: Recent and accurate information on water usage in the West Bank and Gaza is not readily available.

Most water is used for irrigation. A UN report from 1990 indicates that total annual capita consumption for Palestinians in the West Bank was 139 cubic metres, compared to that for settlers of 1,143 cubic metres. Figures for Gaza were 172 cubic metres for Palestinians and 2,326 cubic metres for settlers. Annual per capita consumption in Israel was 411 cubic metres.

India

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid programmes her Department is supporting in India in the current financial year; at what cost; and what was the comparable figure for 1998–99. [97583]

Clare Short: Our programme in India is increasingly focused on working with the states of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal towards the goal of poverty elimination. The bilateral programme includes activities in rural development, water and sanitation, urban poverty, education, health, governance and empowerment, energy and emergency humanitarian assistance as well as assistance through non-governmental organisations. We also help indirectly through contributions to the European Commission and other multilateral organisations.

DFID spending for India in the current financial year is expected to be in the region of £100 million. The provisional figure for the 1998–99 out-turn for our India programme is £83.9 million, although this does not capture all DFID spending for India. The final figure for all DFID spending for India during the last financial year will be published in our next Departmental Report.

Pakistan (Women's Human Rights)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has received on women's human rights in Pakistan; and if she will make a statement. [97816].

Clare Short: We regularly receive such representations from human rights' groups and from individuals. We take every opportunity to ensure that the Pakistan authorities are aware of our concerns, and in particular about discrimination against women. We take account of gender equality issues as a matter of course in our bilateral development assistance, which has focused upon reducing poverty and increasing basic rights and access to essential services—especially for women and girls.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will take steps to ensure that Government procurement, competition policy and investment are addressed at the WTO Seattle Conference. [97896]

Mr. Byers: I have been asked to reply.

Government procurement, competition policy and investment are three of the UK's and EU's priorities for the new comprehensive round of trade negotiations which we hope will be launched at the WTO Seattle Conference. We are pressing hard for these subjects along with our other priorities, including agriculture, services, industrial tariffs and regulatory issues, to be included in the new Round agenda.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on making the WTO subject to greater scrutiny and accountability; and what plans she has to suggest such changes at the WTO Seattle Conference. [97893]

Mr. Byers: I have been asked to reply.

Increasing the transparency of the operations of the WTO, including through High Level Meetings and derestriction of documents, is a high priority for the UK and the WTO. The UK and EU are pushing for decisions to be taken on WTO transparency at the WTO Seattle Conference. At the same time, however, we believe that there is an equal if not greater responsibility on member state Governments to improve communication on trade issues, since it is Governments who make and decide the rules and policies of the WTO in Geneva. This includes dialogue with interest groups and consultation with Parliament. The UK has been working hard at national level to do more in this area and we will continue to do so in the future.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases of people incorrectly claiming Incapacity Benefit instead of the long-term unemployed benefit have been identified *(a)* this year and *(b)* in each of the last three years. [97268]

Mr. Bayley: Entitlement to Incapacity Benefit depends upon a person meeting the requirements of either the Own Occupation Test or the All Work Test. For those in recent employment, the Own Occupation Test applies; this requires a medical certificate confirming that the person is unable to perform their usual job. After six months for these claimants, and from the outset for those not in recent employment, the All Work Test applies; this determines whether the person reaches a set level of physical and/or mental incapacity. People who do not satisfy the relevant test but nevertheless have a degree of mental or physical incapacity can claim Jobseeker's Allowance as unemployed and restrict their availability in any way providing the restrictions are reasonable in the light of their physical or mental condition.

The number of people disallowed Incapacity Benefit because they did not satisfy the relevant test is set out in the table. It should be noted that people can also fail to satisfy the All Work Test because they do not return the questionnaire issued to claimants or because they fail to attend for medical examination. Data for 1998–99 are not yet available.

Number of Incapacity Benefit claims terminated because the claimant did not satisfy the Own Occupation Test or All Work Test

	Did not satisfy the Own Occupation Test	*Did not satisfy the All Work Test*
1995–96	1,300	52,700
1996–97	1,200	94,700
1997–98	1,600	86,300

Note:
Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of Incapacity Benefit recipients

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women have claimed *(a)* Incapacity Benefit and *(b)* Severe Disablement Allowance (i) this year and (ii) in each of the last three years. [97266]

Mr. Bayley: Information split by gender is not available on the number of claims made for Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance, some of which will not result in an award of benefit.

The number of spells of benefit commencing in each of the last three years for which information is available is set out in the table; data for 1998–99 are not yet available.

Spells commencing in the period	*Incapacity Benefit*	*Severe Disablement Allowance*
13 April 1995–31 March 1996	320,700	19,900
1 April 1996–31 March 1997	329,800	19,500
1 April 1997–31 March 1998	325,100	14,200

Note:
Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claimants

Child Support

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will seek to amend the Child Support Acts so that the provision of false information to the Agency relating to income and declared and undeclared earnings is treated as fraud and a criminal offence under the Acts. [97713]

Angela Eagle: As the White Paper "A new contract for welfare: Children's Rights and Parents' Responsibilities" indicated, when legislation for a reformed child support scheme is introduced, we plan to include new criminal penalties for supplying false information in relation to child support and failing to supply information when required to do so. Any person who is subject to the new offence will be liable to a fine of up to £1,000 on conviction.

Pensioners (Overseas)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many British citizens living overseas who retired before 1979 were in receipt of frozen pensions in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [97745]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is on overseas pensioners who retired prior to 1979 for individual years from 1994. This information is in the table.

Overseas retirement pension recipients living in frozen rate countries reaching state pension age before 1979

	Total
1994	81,600
1995	76,800
1996	71,500
1997	65,300
1998	59,100
1999	51,100

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Information has been supplied using a 5 per cent. sample from the Pensions Strategy Computer System (PSCS).
3. The figures supplied are for the number of people reaching state pension age before 1979. They do not indicate whether the people received Retirement Pension in the year of reaching that age.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many British citizens living overseas and in receipt of frozen pensions retired (*a*) before 1979, (*b*) between 1979 and 1992 and (*c*) since 1992. [97744]

Mr. Rooker: The information is in the table.

Overseas retirement pension recipients living in frozen rate countries reaching state pension age

	Total
Before 1979	51,100
1979–92	260,500
Since 1992	140,200

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Information is based on a 5 per cent. sample of the Pensions Strategy Computer System (PSCS).
3. The table shows the number of people who reached state pension age in a given year. It does not indicate whether the people actually received their retirement pension in the year of reaching state pension age.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what criteria are used to determine the countries in which United Kingdom state pensions are uprated in line with inflation; and what proposals he has to amend those criteria. [97897]

Mr. Rooker: UK State Pensions have been payable in certain countries outside the UK since 1929—initially in HM Dominions and then, between 1948–1955, in a small number of European countries. In 1955 Retirement Pensions and widows benefits became payable worldwide. However, upratings were not normally payable.

Over time, the UK has concluded reciprocal social security agreements with some 30 countries. Although most provide for payment of upratings, that is not the primary purpose of such agreements. They are intended mainly to provide a measure of co-ordination between social security schemes for people moving between the UK and the other country during their working lives.

A major consideration in deciding whether to enter into an agreement is the extent to which the advantages to be gained outweigh the cost of negotiating and administering the agreement. Most of the UK's reciprocal social security agreements are over 25 years old. The last to come into force which provides for upratings was in 1992 (with Barbados) and fulfilled a commitment given in the 1970s.

We have no plans to change the current arrangements for uprating UK pensions abroad.

Jobseeker's Allowance (Fraud)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number and percentage of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants have been proved to be claiming fraudulently in each of the last five years; and what savings have been made in each of these years as a result of benefit withdrawal in such cases. [97881]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Number of Jobseeker's Allowance fraud cases and savings made following benefit withdrawal

	Total number of fraud cases detected	*Percentage of average case load over the period*	*Savings*
October 1996-March 1997	15,626	0.8	33,885,344
1997–98	161,512	10.4	556,097,856
1998–99	191,829	14.2	1,054,260,736

Notes:

1. JSA was introduced in October 1996.
2. The savings column figures are the weekly benefit paid to the fraudulent claimants multiplied by 32, the estimated average length of time a claim to benefit would have lasted had the fraud not been detected.

Benefit Fraud (Bolton)

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the level of benefit fraud in the Bolton area; and what targets have been set for the anti-fraud team in Bolton. [97908]

Mr. Rooker: The Benefits Agency (BA) does not keep details of the levels of benefit fraud for specific towns. However, a programme of Area Benefit Reviews (ABRs) are undertaken to measure incidence and customer fraud and error in Income Support (IS) and Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)(IB).

Figures for Greater Manchester, the Area Directorate in which Bolton is situated, indicate that the extent of fraud and customer error is around 10.1 per cent. of IS and JSA (IB) programme expenditure.

We outlined our strategy for tackling fraud and error within the system in "Safeguarding Social Security". A copy of this is available in the Library.

Teams situated in all Area Directorates will be working towards achieving the target and their progress will be measured by a set of Programme Protection Indicators, which will inform whether resources and activities are being targeted efficiently.

Local Authorities have different monetary targets in the form of weekly savings for Housing and Council Tax Benefits. For 1999–2000, Bolton Borough Council's target is to save £688,019 through securer, more accurate benefit payments and investigating cases of alleged fraud.

Disability Living Allowance (West Midlands)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the West Midlands are currently on the waiting list for the consideration of appeals against unsuccessful claims for disability living allowance; and if he will make a statement. [97801]

Mr. Bayley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The number of Disability Living Allowance appeals awaiting hearing in the area handled by the Birmingham office of the Independent Tribunal Service/The Appeals Service (ITS/TAS) was 1,421 at the end of October 1999, the latest period for which figures are available. In addition the Disability Benefits Centre in the Midlands, which covers the West Midlands Area, has 70 cases being prepared for referral to the ITS/TAS.

The Appeals Service remains committed to improving the service it offers to the users of its service and has put in place measures systematically to tackle its oldest cases while ensuring that waiting times for newer appeals are reduced. These measures have seen outstanding loads nationally (for all appeals) fall from 138,827 at the beginning of the current financial year to 68,850 at the end of September, the latest period for which national figures are available.

Child Statistics

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children were living in households in each decile of income up to half average income for each year since the data were collected, broken down by *(a)* whether the children live in (i) one and (ii) two parent families and *(b)* by the economic status of the parents. [97912]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The information is in the tables.

Numbers of children living in households in the bottom three deciles of the income distribution by characteristics of family type and economic status in Great Britain

Million

	Before housing costs			*After housing costs*			*Total children by characteristic*
	Bottom decile	*Second decile*	*Third decile*	*Bottom decile*	*Second decile*	*Third decile*	
1997–98							
Including self-employed							
Two parents	1.2	1.0	0.9	1.1	0.9	1.0	9.9
One parent	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.5	1.1	0.4	2.9
Working parents	0.8	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.7	1.1	10.0
Non-working parents	0.9	1.0	0.6	0.9	1.3	0.4	2.9
Excluding self-employed							
Two parents	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.8	8.3
One parent	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.6	1.0	0.4	2.9
Working parents	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.9	8.3
Non-working parents	0.9	0.9	0.5	1.0	1.2	0.4	2.9
1996–97							
Including self-employed							
Two parents	1.2	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.0	0.9	10.0
One parent	0.5	0.9	0.7	0.5	1.1	0.5	3.0
Working parents	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.7	1.0	9.7
Non-working parents	1.0	1.1	0.7	1.0	1.4	0.5	3.3
Excluding self-employed							
Two parents	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.7	8.4
One parent	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.5	1.1	0.5	2.9
Working parents	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.6	0.8	8.1
Non-working parents	1.0	1.0	0.6	1.0	1.3	0.5	3.2
1995–96							
Including self-employed							
Two parents	1.2	0.9	0.9	1.2	0.9	0.9	9.8
One parent	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.4	1.0	0.6	2.8
Working parents	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.7	0.6	0.9	9.5
Non-working parents	0.9	1.0	0.7	0.9	1.3	0.6	3.2

Numbers of children living in households in the bottom three deciles of the income distribution by characteristics of family type and economic status in Great Britain

Million

	Before housing costs			*After housing costs*			*Total children*
	Bottom decile	*Second decile*	*Third decile*	*Bottom decile*	*Second decile*	*Third decile*	*by characteristic*
Excluding self-employed							
Two parents	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.7	0.7	8.1
One parent	0.3	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.9	0.6	2.8
Working parents	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.7	7.7
Non-working parents	1.0	1.0	0.6	1.1	1.2	0.5	3.2
1994–95							
Including self-employed							
Two parents	1.2	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.0	0.9	10.0
One parent	0.3	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.9	0.6	2.6
Working parents	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.7	0.6	0.9	9.7
Non-working parents	0.9	1.0	0.6	0.8	1.3	0.6	3.1
Excluding self-employed							
Two parents	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.7	8.3
One parent	0.3	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.9	0.5	2.6
Working parents	0.3	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.7	7.8
Non-working parents	1.0	0.9	0.6	0.9	1.2	0.5	3.0

Source:
Family Resources Survey

Numbers of children living in households in the bottom three deciles of the income distribution by characteristics of family type and economic status in the United Kingdom in 1979

Million

	Before housing costs			*After housing costs*			*Total children*
	Bottom decile	*Second decile*	*Third decile*	*Bottom decile*	*Second decile*	*Third decile*	*by characteristic*
Including self-employed							
Two parents	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.6	12.3
One parent	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	1.4
Working parents	0.7	1.1	1.6	0.8	1.1	1.7	12.4
Non-working parents	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.7	0.3	0.2	1.5
Excluding self-employed							
Two parents	0.9	1.0	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.4	11.1
One parent	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	1.4
Working parents	0.5	1.0	1.4	0.5	1.0	1.5	11.1
Non-working parents	0.8	0.4	0.1	0.7	0.3	0.2	1.5

Notes:
1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data sets. The current series is based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) and is available for years 1994–95 to 1997–98 and covers Great Britain but not Northern Ireland. Information is also provided for 1979 from the previous HBAI series which was based on the Family Expenditure Survey and covered the United Kingdom. The two series are not strictly comparable due to changes in definition.
2. The figures presented will be subject to sampling error. Figures for children are sensitive to the choice of equivalence scale.
3. Figures may not sum due to rounding. The results for children according to the number of parents in the family exclude a small number of children who live with pensioners. These children are included in the breakdown by economic type.
4. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect The composition of the household). It is standard HBAI practice to give results for income both before and after housing costs, in order to allow for the effect of variations in housing costs between households. Results are also provided including and excluding the self-employed, reflecting the inherent uncertainty of income measures for the self-employed.
5. Three deciles are shown because in 1997–98 the half average point After Housing Costs lies in the third decile. The Before Housing Costs half average in 1997–98 lies in the second decile. Results for the bottom decile should be treated with caution as evidence suggests that income data for these households may be subject to measurement error.

Source:
Family Resources Survey

Family Credit (Pensions)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in receipt of family credit have *(a)* private and *(b)* occupational pension arrangements. [98023]

Angela Eagle: It is estimated that around 1 in 10 working people in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit have a personal pension. Around 1 in 15 have an occupational pension.

Earnings Top-up

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* single people and *(b)* couples with dependent children have received Earnings Top-up in each of the pilot areas. [98027]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Single people in receipt of ETU between October 1996 and October 1999

Pilot area	*Number of single recipients*
All areas	44,037
Newcastle upon Tyne	7,192
Barnsley, Castleford, Pontefract, Wakefield and Dewsbury	4,258
Southend	1,587
Wales	5,808
Sunderland	11,695
Doncaster	6,915
Bournemouth	3,191
Scotland	3,391

Notes:

1. Earnings Top-Up was awarded to couples or single people without dependants.
2. Figure is based on a 100 per cent. sample.
3. Couples with dependent children were not eligible for Earnings Top-Up, but would have been able to claim Family Credit or, from 5 October 1999, Working Families Tax Credit.

Source:

Earnings Top-Up Monthly Statistics, October 1999.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97413]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

The Department of Social Security expenditure on consultants for each of the last four financial years

£ million

Year	*Expenditure*
1995–96	28.3
1996–97	23.3
1997–98	19.9
1998–99	27.2

Note:

Figures rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Pensioners

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress he is making towards co-ordinating departmental policy towards financial support for pensioners. [96800]

Mr. Rooker: In June 1998, the Prime Minister set up the Inter-Ministerial Group for Older People to make sure that the needs of older people are better understood and that action to help them is effectively co-ordinated across Government. The Group meets regularly to discuss and synchronize our programme of help for older people. The Group has already undertaken an audit of cross government initiatives to identify those that effect older people.

At present, the Group is focusing on three key areas—productive ageing, health and care and consultation and involvement.

As part of the consultation process, members of the Inter-Ministerial Group are taking part in a series of "listening to older people" events. These are being organised with non-governmental organisations supporting the UN Year of Older Persons.

The listening events, alongside other research the Group has commissioned, will provide information and feedback that will be invaluable in deciding priorities and helping shape the Government's policies to meet them.

Minimum Income Guarantee (Pensioners)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the proposed new measures to trace pensioners entitled to the minimum income guarantee will be introduced; and for what reason the measures were not taken in April. [97510]

Mr. Rooker: The national programme to encourage pensioners to claim their entitlement is being developed to take account of results from the large scale evaluation of the Pilot take-up initiatives which will be published later this year. We will present our plans for the national programme in due course.

Benefits Uprating

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the new rates of benefit proposed from April 2000. [98350]

Mr. Darling: The information requested is set out in the schedule. The Annual uprating of benefits will take place in the first full week of the tax year. In 2000, this will be the week beginning 10 April. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland proposes to introduce similar changes for Northern Ireland.

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
Attendance Allowance:		
higher rate	52.95	53.55
lower rate	35.40	35.80
Child Benefit:		
only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable (couple)	14.40	15.00
only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable (lone parent)	17.10	17.55
each subsequent child	9.60	10.00
Child's Special Allowance: see note on Child Dependency Increase	11.35	11.35
Council Tax Benefit:		
Personal allowances		
single		
18 to 24	40.70	41.35
25 or over	51.40	52.20

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
lone parent—18 or over	51.40	52.20
couple—one or both over 18	80.65	81.95
Dependent Children		
from birth to September following 16th birthday	25.90	26.60
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	30.95	31.75
Premiums		
family	13.90	14.25
family (lone parent rate)	22.05	22.20
pensioner		
single	23.60	26.25
couple	35.95	40.00
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	25.90	28.65
couple	39.20	43.40
pensioner (higher)		
single	30.85	33.85
couple	44.65	49.10
disability		
single	21.90	22.25
couple	31.25	31.75
severe disability		
single	39.75	40.20
couple (one qualifies)	39.75	40.20
couple (both qualify)	79.50	80.40
disabled child	21.90	22.25
carer	13.95	14.15
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	16.70	16.90
lower rate	13.35	13.50
Non-dependant deductions aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: £259 or more	6.50	6.95
gross income: £207 - £258.99	5.40	5.80
gross income: £120 - £206.99	4.30	4.60
gross income less than £120	2.15	2.30
others, aged 18 or over	2.20	2.30
Alternative maximum Council Tax Benefit		
second adult on IS or JSA (ib)	25% of Council Tax	
second adult's gross income:	15% of Council Tax	
under £120		
£120 to £156.99	7.5% of Council Tax	
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15.00	15.00
various specified employments	15.00	15.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	15.00	15.00
childcare charges	70.00	70.00
childcare charges (2 or more children)	105.00	105.00
other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hr Adult Allowance in DPTC	11.05	11.25
30 Hr Adult Credit in WFTC	11.05	11.25
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Dependency Increases:		
Adult Dependency Increases		
For spouse or person looking after children, with; retirement pension on own insurance, long term incapacity benefit, unemployability supplement	39.95	40.40
severe disablement allowance	23.95	24.20
invalid care allowance	23.90	24.15
short-term incapacity benefit if beneficiary over pension age	38.40	38.80
maternity allowance/short-term incapacity benefit	31.15	31.50
Child dependency increases, with; retirement pension, widows benefit, short-term incapacity benefit at the higher rate & long term incapacity benefit, invalid care allowance severe disablement allowance, higher rate industrial death benefit, unemployability supplement and short-term incapacity benefit if beneficiary over pension age[1]	11.35	11.35
Disability Living Allowance:		
Care Component		
Highest	52.95	53.55
Middle	35.40	35.80
Lowest	14.05	14.20
Mobility Component		
Higher	37.00	37.40
Lower	14.05	14.20
Earnings Rules		
Invalid Care Allowance	50.00	50.00
Limit of earnings from councillor's allowance	49.50	50.00
Therapeutic earnings limit	58.00	58.50

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
Industrial injuries unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	3,016.00	3,042.00
War pensioners' unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	3,016.00	3,042.00
Adult dependency increases with short-term incap. benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	31.15	31.50
(b) over pension age	38.40	38.80
maternity allowance	31.15	31.50
retirement pension, long-term incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance, unemployability supplement where dependant		
(a) is living with claimant	51.40	52.50
(b) still qualifies for the tapered earnings rule	45.09	45.09
retirement pension, long-term incap benefit and unemployability supplement where dependant not living with claimant	39.95	40.40
severe disablement allowance where dependant not living with claimant	23.95	24.20
invalid care allowance	23.90	24.15
Child dependency increases level at which CDIs are affected by earnings of claimant's spouse or partner		
for first child	145.00	145.00
for each subsequent child	19.00	19.00
Guardian's Allowance see note on Child Dependency Increase	11.35	11.35
Hospital Downrating		
20% rate	13.35	13.50
40% rate	26.70	27.00
Housing Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
16 to 24	40.70	41.35
25 or over	51.40	52.20
lone parent		
under 18	40.70	41.35
18 or over	51.40	52.20
couple		
both under 18	61.35	62.35
one or both over 18	80.65	81.95
dependent children		
from birth to September following 16th birthday	25.90	26.60
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	30.95	31.75
Premiums		
family	13.90	14.25
family (lone parent rate)	22.05	22.20
pensioner		
single	23.60	26.25
couple	35.95	40.00
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	25.90	28.65
couple	39.20	43.40
pensioner (higher)		
single	30.85	33.85
couple	44.65	49.10
disability		
single	21.90	22.25
couple	31.25	31.75
severe disability		
single	39.75	40.20
couple (one qualifies)	39.75	40.20
couple (both qualify)	79.50	80.40
disabled child	21.90	22.25
carer	13.95	14.15
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	16.70	16.90
lower rate	13.35	13.50
Non-dependant deductions		
rent rebates and allowances aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers Allowance aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or gross income less than £81.00	7.20	7.40
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: less than £81.00	7.20	7.40
gross income: £81 to £117.99	16.50	17.00
gross income: £118 to £154.99	22.65	23.35
gross income: £155 to £203.99	37.10	38.20
gross income: £204.00 to £254.99	42.25	43.50
gross income: £255.00 and above	46.35	47.75
Service charges for fuel		
heating	9.25	9.25
hot water	1.15	1.15
lighting	0.80	0.80
cooking	1.15	1.15
Amount ineligible for meals		
three or more meals a day		
single claimant	18.35	18.65
each person in family aged 16 or over	18.35	18.65
each child under 16	9.25	9.40
less than three meals a day		
single claimant	12.20	12.40
each person in family aged 16 or over	12.20	12.40
each child under 16	6.15	6.25
breakfast only—claimant and each member of family	2.20	2.25
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit for perm. res. of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amt disregarded for perm. res. of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15.00	15.00
various specified employments	15.00	15.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	15.00	15.00
childcare charges	70.00	70.00
childcare charges (2 or more children)	105.00	105.00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hr Adult Allowance in DPTC	11.05	11.25
30 Hr Adult Credit in WFTC	11.05	11.25
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Incapacity Benefit		
Long-term Incapacity Benefit	66.75	67.50
Short-term Incapacity Benefit (under pension age)		
lower rate	50.35	50.90
higher rate	59.55	60.20
Short-term Incapacity Benefit (over pension age)		
lower rate	64.05	64.75
higher rate	66.75	67.50
Increase of Long-term Incapacity Benefit for age		
higher rate	14.05	14.20
lower rate	7.05	7.10
Invalidity Allowance (Transitional)		
higher rate	14.05	14.20
middle rate	8.90	9.00
lower rate	4.45	4.50
Income Support		
Personal Allowances		
single		
under 18—usual rate	30.95	31.45
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	40.70	41.35
18 to 24	40.70	41.35
25 or over	51.40	52.20
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	30.95	31.45
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	40.70	41.35
18 or over	51.40	52.20
couple		
both under 18	61.35	62.35
one or both 18 or over	80.65	81.95

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
dependent children		
birth to September following 16th birthday	25.90	26.60
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	30.95	31.75
Residential Allowance		
except Greater London	59.40	61.30
Greater London	66.10	68.20
Premiums		
family	13.90	14.25
family (lone parent rate)	15.75	15.90
pensioner		
single	23.60	26.25
couple	35.95	40.00
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	25.90	28.65
couple	39.20	43.40
pensioner (higher)		
single	30.85	33.85
couple	44.65	49.10
disability		
single	21.90	22.25
couple	31.25	31.75
severe disability		
single	39.75	40.20
couple (one qualifies)	39.75	40.20
couple (both qualify)	79.50	80.40
disabled child	21.90	22.25
carer	13.95	14.15
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in residential care homes:		
old age	218.00	221.00
very dependent elderly	252.00	256.00
mental disorder (not handicap)	230.00	234.00
drug/alcohol dependence	230.00	234.00
mental handicap	262.00	266.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	298.00	303.00
(b) (over pension age)	218.00	221.00
others	218.00	221.00
maximum Greater London increase	45.00	46.00
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	326.00	331.00
drug/alcohol dependence	326.00	331.00
mental handicap	332.00	337.00
terminal illness	325.00	330.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	367.00	373.00
(b) (over pension age)	325.00	330.00
others (including elderly)	325.00	330.00
maximum Greater London increase	50.00	51.00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation (Daily Rate)		
breakfast	1.10	1.10
midday meal	1.55	1.55
evening meal	1.55	1.55

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes		
personal expenses	14.75	15.45
dependent children		
(a) under 11	6.05	6.15
(b) 11 to 15	8.85	9.00
(c) 16 to 17	10.25	10.40
(d) age 18	14.75	15.00
hospital		
higher rate	16.70	16.90
lower rate	13.35	13.50
Local authority (Pt III)		
accommodation	66.75	67.50
of which, Personal Expenses	14.75	15.45
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in:		
the Polish home Ilford Park		
max amount for accommodation and meals	367.00	373.00
personal expenses for claimant	17.35	17.35
personal expenses for partner	17.35	17.35
personal expenses for dep children		
(a) under 11	6.05	6.15
(b) 11 to 15	8.85	9.00
(c) 16 to 17	10.25	10.40
(d) 18	15.55	15.55
Housing costs deduction for non-dependants		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers Allowance		
aged 18 or over, not in work or gross income less than £81.00	7.20	7.40
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work:		
gross income: £81 to £117.99	16.50	17.00
gross income: £118 to £154.99	22.65	26.35
gross income: £155 to £203.99	37.10	38.20
gross income: £204.00 to £254.99	42.25	43.50
gross income: £255.00 and above	46.35	47.75
Deduction for direct payments arrears of housing, fuel and water costs council tax and fines default and	2.60	2.65
deductions for child maintenance (standard)	5.20	5.30
deductions for child maintenance (lower)	2.60	2.65
Arrears of Community Charge court order against claimant	2.60	2.65
court order against couple	4.05	4.10
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments ordinary overpayments	7.80	7.95
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.40	10.40
Reduction in benefit for strikers	27.50	28.00
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amt disregarded of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
couples earnings	10.00	10.00
higher earnings	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Industrial Death Benefit		
Widow's pension		
higher rate	66.75	67.50
lower rate	20.03	20.25
Industrial Injuries Disablement Pension		
18 and over, or under 18 with dependants		
100%	108.10	109.30
90%	97.29	98.37
80%	86.48	87.44
70%	75.67	76.51
60%	64.86	65.58
50%	54.05	54.65
40%	43.24	43.72
30%	32.43	34.79
20%	21.62	21.86
Under 18		
100%	66.20	66.95
90%	59.58	60.26
80%	52.96	53.56
70%	46.34	46.87
60%	39.72	40.17
50%	33.10	33.48
40%	26.48	26.78
30%	19.86	20.09
20%	13.24	13.39
Maximum life gratuity (lump sum)	7,180.00	7,260.00
Unemployability Supplement	66.75	67.50
plus where appropriate an increase for early incapacity		
higher rate	14.05	14.20
middle rate	8.90	9.00
lower rate	4.45	4.50
Maximum reduced earnings allowance	43.24	43.72
Maximum retirement allowance	10.81	10.93
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	86.60	87.60
intermediate rate	64.95	65.70
normal maximum rate	43.30	43.80
part-time rate	21.65	21.90
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	43.30	43.80

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	Rates 2000
Invalid Care Allowance	39.95	40.40
Jobseekers Allowance		
Contribution based JSA—pers. rates		
under 18	30.95	31.45
18 to 24	40.70	41.35
25 or over	51.40	52.20
Income-based JSA—pers. allowances		
under 18	30.95	31.45
18 to 24	40.70	41.35
25 or over	51.40	52.20
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	30.95	31.45
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	40.70	41.35
18 or over	51.40	52.20
couple		
both under 18	30.95	31.45
both under 18, one disabled	40.70	41.35
both under 18, with resp. for a child	61.35	62.35
one under 18, one 18–24	40.70	41.35
one under 18, one 25+	51.40	52.20
both 18 or over	80.65	81.95
dependent children		
from birth to September following 16th birthday	25.90	26.60
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	30.95	31.75
Residential Allowance		
except Greater London	59.40	61.30
Greater London	66.10	68.20
Premiums		
family	13.90	14.25
family (lone parent rate)	15.75	15.90
pensioner		
single	23.60	26.25
couple	35.95	40.00
pensioner (enhanced)		
couple	39.20	43.40
pensioner (higher)		
single	30.85	33.85
couple	44.65	49.10
disability		
single	21.90	22.25
couple	31.25	31.75
severe disability		
single	39.75	40.20
couple (one qualifies)	39.75	40.20
couple (both qualify)	79.50	80.40
disabled child	21.90	22.25
carer	13.95	14.15
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in residential care homes:		
mental disorder (not handicap)	230.00	234.00
drug/alcohol dependence	230.00	234.00
mental handicap	262.00	266.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	298.00	303.00
others	218.00	221.00
maximum Greater London increase	45.00	46.00

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	Rates 2000
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	326.00	331.00
drug/alcohol dependence	326.00	331.00
mental handicap	332.00	337.00
terminal illness	325.00	330.00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	367.00	373.00
others (including elderly)	325.00	330.00
maximum Greater London increase	50.00	51.00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation: (Daily Rate)		
breakfast	1.10	1.10
midday meal	1.55	1.55
evening meal	1.55	1.55
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes:		
personal expenses	14.75	15.45
dependent children		
(a) under 11	6.05	6.15
(b) 11 to 15	8.85	9.00
(c) 16 to 17	10.25	10.40
(d) age 18	14.75	15.00
hospital		
higher rate	16.70	16.90
lower rate	13.35	13.50
local authority (Pt III)		
accommodation	66.75	67.50
of which, Personal Expenses	14.75	15.00
Housing costs		
deduction for non-dependants		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers Allowance		
aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or		
gross income less than £81.00	7.20	7.40
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: less than £81.00	7.20	7.40
gross income: £81 to £117.99	16.50	17.00
gross income: £118 to £154.99	22.65	23.35
gross income: £155 to £203.99	37.10	38.20
gross income: £204.00 to £254.99	42.25	43.50
gross income: £255.00 and above	46.35	47.75
Deduction for direct payments		
Deductions from JSA (IB)		
arrears of housing, fuel and water costs council tax and fines default, and	2.60	2.65
Deductions for Child Maintenance		
deductions for child maintenance (standard)	5.20	5.30
deductions for child maintenance (lower)	2.60	2.65
Arrears of Community Charge		
court order against claimant	2.60	2.65
court order against couple	4.05	4.10
Deductions from JSA (Cont.)		
Arrears of Comm. Charge, Council Tax, fines & overpayment recovery		
Age 16–17	10.31	10.48
Age 18–24	13.56	13.78
Age 25+	17.13	17.40

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Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
Maximum deduction for arrears of Child Supp. Maintenance		
Age 16–17	10.31	10.48
Age 18–24	13.56	13.78
Age 25+	17.13	17.40
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments in JSA (ib)		
ordinary overpayments	7.80	7.95
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.40	10.40
Reduction in benefit for strikers	27.50	28.00
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amt disregarded of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
couples earnings	10.00	10.00
higher earnings	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.25	9.25
Maternity Allowance		
Lower rate	51.70	52.25
Higher rate	59.55	60.20
New standard rate	0.00	60.20
MA threshold	0.00	30.00
Pneumoconiosis, Byssinosis, and Miscellaneous Diseases Scheme and the Workmen's Compensation (Supplementation)		
Total disablement allowance and major incapacity allowance (maximum)	108.10	109.30
Partial disablement allowance	39.95	40.40
Unemployability supplement plus where appropriate increases for early incapacity	66.70	67.50
higher rate	14.05	14.20
middle rate	8.90	9.00
lower rate	4.45	4.50
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	86.60	87.60
intermediate rate	64.95	65.70
normal maximum rate	43.30	43.80
part-time rate	21.65	21.90
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	43.30	43.80
Lesser incapacity allowance		
maximum rate of allowance	39.95	40.40
based on loss of earnings over	52.95	53.55

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	*Rates 2000*
Retirement Pension		
Category A or B	66.75	67.50
Category B (lower)—husband's insurance	39.95	40.40
Category C or D—non-contributory	39.95	40.40
Category C (lower)—non-contributory	23.90	24.15
Additional pension	Increase by:	1.1%
Increments to:-		
Basic & additional pensions	Increase by:	
Contracted out deductions (CODs) (Pre April 1988 earnings)		1.1%
Graduated Retirement Benefit (GRB)		
Increments to CODs (April 1988-April 1996 earnings)	Additional increase	Nil
(3.0% paid by schemes)	0.2% to that paid by schemes	
Graduated Retirement Benefit (unit)(pence)	8.67	8.77
Graduated Retirement Benefit (Inherited)		Increase by: 1.1%
Addition at age 80	0.25	0.25
Severe Disablement Allowance		
Basic rate	40.35	40.80
Age-related addition (from December 1990)		
Higher rate	14.05	14.20
Middle rate	8.90	9.00
Lower rate	4.45	4.50
Statutory Maternity Pay		
Earnings threshold	66.00	67.00
Lower rate	59.55	60.20
Statutory Sick Pay		
Earnings threshold	66.00	67.00
Standard rate	59.55	60.20
War Pensions		
Disablement Pension (100% rates)		
officer (£ per annum)	5,985.00	6,053.00
other ranks	114.70	116.00
Age allowances		
40–50%	7.65	7.75
over 50% but not over 70%	11.80	11.95
over 70% but not over 90%	16.80	17.00
over 90%	23.60	23.90
Disablement gratuity		
specified minor injury (minimum)	730.00	738.00
specified minor injury (maximum)	5,453.00	5,513.00
unspecified minor injury (minimum)	303.00	306.00
unspecified minor injury (maximum)	7,091.00	7,169.00

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	Rates 2000
Unemployability allowance		
personal	70.85	71.65
adult dependency increase	39.95	40.40
increase for first child (See note on Child Dependency Increase)	9.90	9.85
increase for subsequent children (See note on Child Dependency Increase)	11.35	11.35
Invalidity allowance		
higher rate	14.05	14.20
middle rate	8.90	9.00
lower rate	4.45	4.50
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	86.60	87.60
intermediate rate	64.95	65.70
normal maximum rate	43.30	43.80
part-time rate	21.65	21.90
Comforts allowance		
higher rate	18.60	18.80
lower rate	9.30	9.40
Mobility supplement	41.25	41.70
Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)	43.24	43.72
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	43.30	43.80
Severe disablement occupational allowance	21.65	21.90
Clothing allowance (£ per annum)	147.00	149.00
Education allowance (£ per annum, maximum)	120.00	120.00
War widow's pension (further details in schedule WWP)		
Widow (private)	86.60	87.55
Widow (NCO)	86.90	87.55
Widow—Officer (£ per annum, maximum)	5,356.00	5,415.00
Childless widow u-40 (private)	20.03	20.25
Childless widow (NCO)	20.33	20.55
Childless widow (Officer maximum £ per annum)	5,356.00	5,415.00
Supplementary Pension	56.45	57.07
age allowance		
(a) age 65 to 69	9.90	10.00
(b) age 70 to 79	19.00	19.20
(c) age 80 and over	28.30	28.60
children's allowance		
increase for first child (See note on Child Dependency Increase)	14.35	14.35
increase for subsequent children (See note on Child Dependency Increase)	15.80	15.85
Orphan's pension		
increase for first child (See note on Child Dependency Increase)	16.20	16.20
increase for subsequent children (See note on Child Dependency Increase)	17.65	17.70
Unmarried dependant living as spouse (max)	84.55	85.50
Rent allowance (maximum)	32.75	33.10

Social Security Benefit Rates
(Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Rates 1999	Rates 2000
Adult orphan's pension (maximum)	66.75	67.50
Widower's pension		
private (maximum)	86.60	87.55
officer (£ per annum, maximum)	5,356.00	5,415.00
Widow's Benefit		
Widow's payment (lump sum)	1,000.00	1,000.00
Widowed mother's allowance	66.75	67.50
Widow's pension		
standard rate	66.75	67.50
age-related[1]		
age 54 (49)	62.08	62.78
53 (48)	57.41	58.05
52 (47)	52.73	53.33
51 (46)	48.06	48.60
50 (45)	43.39	43.88
49 (44)	38.72	39.15
48 (43)	34.04	34.43
47 (42)	29.37	29.70
46 (41)	24.70	24.98
45 (40)	20.03	20.25

[1] NB—The Overlapping Benefits Regulations provide for the rate of child dependency increases, guardian's allowance and child special allowance to be adjusted where the increase or allowance is payable for the eldest eligible child for whom ChB is also payable. The weekly rate of the increase or allowance is reduced by the differential (less the £3.50 from April 2000) between the rate of ChB payable for the oldest eligible child and that payable for a subsequent child.
[2] Includes £2.50 increase from 9 November 1998.
[3] For deaths occurring before 11 April 1988 refer to age-points shown in brackets.

CABINET OFFICE

Drug Misuse

7. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has for consulting the public on future Government policy on drug misuse. [96786]

Marjorie Mowlam: I can assure the hon. Member that the Government will continue to consult widely at both national and local level on drugs policy.

12. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress is being made towards achieving the Government's targets on combating drug misuse. [96792]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) today, *Official Report*, column 1115.

16. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress is being made in tackling the problem of drug taking among young people. [96796]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator set out the Government's objectives in his annual report and plan. £22.5 million has been made available over the next three years to assist schools to deliver effective drug education.

Public Appointments

8. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the current inquiries being undertaken by the Independent Commissioner for Public Appointments. [96787]

Mr. Stringer: In response to concerns raised with the Commissioner for Public Appointments, she is currently undertaking a scrutiny covering all aspects of the NHS appointments system. This will pay particular attention to the selection of politically active and politically nominated candidates.

Ethnic Minorities

9. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress has been made in recruiting black and Asian people into senior civil service posts. [96789]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We have set targets in the Modernising Government White Paper that by the year 2004–05, 3.2 per cent. of the Senior Civil Service will be from ethnic minority backgrounds—double the current figure. We will report on the progress we have made against these targets next year.

10. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on progress towards meeting targets for recruitment of ethnic minorities into the Civil Service. [96790]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Modernising Government White Paper firmly establishes our commitment to achieving diversity in the Civil Service.

Departments will propose targets for ethnic minority recruitment by December 1999 and I will report on the progress next year.

Modernising Government

11. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when progress has been made in improving liaison between Government services as set out in the "Modernising Government" White Paper. [96791]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government secure intranet now enables 35 Government Departments to securely exchange electronic communications.

21. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what actions she has taken to implement the Government's White Paper on "Modernising Government". [96802]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The actions we are taking are contained in the Modernising Government Action Plan published in July.

Government Policy (Presentation)

13. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list her four most urgent priorities for the presentation of Government policy. [96793]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My priority is to work with colleagues to deliver our manifesto commitments.

Genetically Modified Organisms

14. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what changes have been made in the Government's policy on genetically modified foods since 27 July; and if she will make a statement. [96794]

20. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on genetically modified foods. [96801]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government's policy has not changed. Our primary role is that of balancing consumer choice with the protection of human health and the environment.

18. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what meetings she has had since her appointment to discuss the Government's policy on genetically modified organisms. [96798]

Marjorie Mowlam: I have received representations from a number of outside organisations and I am in the process of meeting with them.

Special Advisers

15. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the costs of Government Special Advisers. [96795]

Marjorie Mowlam: The estimated cost of Special Advisers in 1999–2000 is £3.9 million.

Correspondence

17. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on her plans to reduce the time it takes Departments to reply to hon. Members' letters; and if she will publish a table showing the current performance of Departments. [96797]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government are determined to improve their handling of correspondence from hon. Members. We have already set a new standard for replying to correspondence and are actively seeking out and promoting examples of good practice in correspondence handling across all Departments and agencies. A table detailing the performance of individual Departments was published by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) in June.

IT Strategy

19. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on progress made in developing and implementing a Government IT strategy. [96799]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We have made a commitment in the Modernising Government Action Plan to publish a corporate IT strategy for Government in March 2000. We will publish a number of framework policies for specific technologies during November and December, which will be incorporated in the strategy.

Civil Service

22. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will set out the Government's policy on the neutrality of the civil service. [96803]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) today, *Official Report*, column 1118.

Ministerial Memoirs

23. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has to change the Cabinet Office rules governing the publication of ministerial memoirs. [96804]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The *Ministerial Code* requires Ministers to conform to the principles set out in the Radcliffe Report of 1976 if, after leaving office, they publish books drawing on their experience in government. The same principles have been applied by successive administrations and the Government have no plans to change them.

Ecstasy

24. **Mr. Shaw:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what she is doing to warn young people about the dangers of ecstasy. [96805]

Marjorie Mowlam: The UK Anti Drugs Co-ordinator is working with Departments to ensure that young people receive information on drugs appropriate to their age and experience throughout their school career and beyond. The Department of Health has contracted the Health Education Authority to deliver a national publicity campaign, which will include warning young people about the dangers of ecstasy.

Biotechnology Presentation Group

25. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what instructions she has given to the biotechnology presentation group. [96806]

Marjorie Mowlam: I chair the group, which comprises other ministerial colleagues, to discuss the presentation of Government policy on Biotechnology.

E-commerce

26. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what role she plays in co-ordinating the working of different Government Departments in relation to e-commerce legislation in the UK and internationally. [96807]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I am responsible for the effective co-ordination and presentation of the full range of the Government's policies, including e-commerce. The Prime Minister has appointed an E-Envoy, based in the Cabinet Office. He will report to the E-Minister and myself.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that police forces and local authorities use the powers available to them under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [97868]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The use of powers under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is a matter for local authorities, the police and the courts. I am, however, keen to promote their full use where appropriate. Guidance has already been issued on all aspects of the Act, and last month my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, wrote to all local authority Chief Executives encouraging them to take proper advantage of the Act's new powers to deal with unruly and anti-social behaviour. This letter was copied to all Chief Officers of Police.

Corruption (Illegal Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of cases of corruption involving *(a)* police, *(b)* prison and *(c)* customs officers which have involved illegal drugs in each of the last five years. [97509]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information is held centrally only on the number of police officers convicted of offences of corruption. The total for each of the last five years is shown in the table. The figures held centrally do not indicate those cases which involved drugs:

Year	*Number*
1994	2
1995–96	1
1996–97	5
1997–98	1
1998–99	2

In the case of the Prison Service, centrally held records (which are not necessarily complete) show that since December 1993, two prison staff have been dismissed and one member of staff resigned, following allegations that they have been involved in supplying or procuring illegal drugs.

I understand from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise that one officer resigned in 1996, one was dismissed this year and another officer is currently suspended following the investigation of cases of drug related corruption.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97424]

Mr. Straw: Expenditure on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years by my Department was as follows:

Year	*£*
1995–96	10,200,000
1996–97	11,804,984
1997–98	7,627,016
1998–99	4,588,445

Prison Management

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluation his Department's assessors made of the proposals for prison regimes of the separate bidders for the contract to manage HMP Doncaster; and if he will make a statement. [97728]

Mr. Boateng: The evaluation of the operational proposals was based on two Prison Service objectives:

To protect the public by holding those committed by the courts in a safe, decent and healthy environment:

to run a secure and orderly prison;

to treat people fairly, openly and correctly in our work;

to provide decent conditions of care; and

to manage all resources effectively.

To reduce crime by providing constructive regimes which address offending behaviour in custody and after release.

Each of these two objectives is underpinned by more detailed criteria. Each bid was scored against these criteria and all exceeded the minimum operational requirements.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information relating to the competitive tendering process for the management of prison contracts is made publicly available; and if he will make a statement. [97732]

Mr. Boateng: In each competition for the management of a prison, invitations to tender are issued in which bidders are given guidance on what needs to be covered in their bids and how the competition thereafter will be run. These documents are publicly available.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what costs will be incurred, and who will be responsible for them, as a result of the transfer of the management of HMP Buckley Hall from Group 4 to the Prison Service; and if he will make a statement. [97735]

Mr. Boateng: The start up costs to the Prison Service identified in the bid for Buckley Hall are estimated to be £450,000. They will form part of the overall contract price.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to market-test prisons which fail to meet performance standards; and if he will make a statement. [97737]

Mr. Boateng: The Prison Service is developing the criteria to be used to identify which failing prisons should be market tested. I have asked them to report to me on this in January.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the bid evaluation documents relating to the competitive tendering process for *(a)* HMP Doncaster and *(b)* HMP Buckley Hall; and if he will make a statement. [97726]

Mr. Boateng: The bid evaluation documents for both Doncaster and Buckley Hall prisons contain commercially sensitive information and are treated as commercial in confidence; therefore, they cannot be published.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what overall evaluation his Department's assessors made of the separate bids for the contract to manage HMP Doncaster; and if he will make a statement; [97729]

(2) what the criteria are for evaluating bids for the management of prisons; and if he will make a statement. [97730]

Mr. Boateng: Bids for the management of prisons are assessed on the criteria of deliverability, cost and quality. Deliverability is assessed in terms of financial robustness and operational effectiveness. Cost, expressed in terms of net present value, and quality are then considered. In evaluating proposals, assessors look for evidence that bidders have clear and feasible plans for meeting the requirements and that staff numbers and mix are compatible with the design and regime of the establishment.

All the bids for the management of Doncaster prison, from the in-house bid team, Premier Prison Services and Group 4, were judged by the evaluation panel to exceed the minimum requirements.

The marking system was based on the two Prison Service objectives and their five functions. Each function was broken down into sections, or secondary criteria, and a list of key criteria was devised for each section which sets out the main points to be addressed in order for the requirements to be met. Bidders' responses were marked on a scale of 0 to 6 according to the quality of their responses in how they met the requirements of each of the key criteria.

Premier Prison Services' bid was assessed as best fulfilling these criteria to win the contract for Doncaster prison.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reason is for extending the period of new private prison contracts to 10 years from the previous limit of five years; and if he will make a statement. [97734]

Mr. Boateng: Bids were invited for 5 years and ten years. The ten year option offered better value for money for both Buckley Hall and Doncaster prisons.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the results of HMP Doncaster and HMP Buckley Hall on key performance indicators in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [97727]

Mr. Boateng: The key performance indicator (KPI) results for Doncaster and Buckley Hall prisons are given in the tables. Figures are only available since April 1996.

KPI results for overcrowding, cost per place and staff training are excluded from this analysis. The overcrowding KPI is formulated in terms of overall Prison Service capacity and population levels and is, therefore, not applicable to individual prisons. Cost per place figures for private prisons are not calculated on a basis comparable with the Prison Service KPI and private prisons are not required to provide information on staff training levels.

Her Majesty's Prison Doncaster

KPI	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Escapes	0	0	0
Assault rate (percentage)	20.5	19.2	19.7
Average weekly purposeful activity hours	24.0	16.7	17.0
Positive mandatory drug tests (percentage)	27.6	22.8	12.8
Offending Behaviour Programmes (including sex offender programmes)	0	0	0
Prisoners on standard and enhanced regimes unlocked for at least 10 hours on weekdays?	Yes	Yes	Yes

Her Majesty's Prison Buckley Hall

KPI	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Escapes	4	1	0
Assault rate (percentage)	4.7	4.5	2.9
Average weekly purposeful activity hours	28.5	32.8	26.6
Positive mandatory drug tests (percentage)	37.4	38.7	37.4
Offending Behaviour Programmes (including sex offender programmes)	0	0	0
Prisoners on standard and enhanced regimes unlocked for at least 10 hours on weekdays?	Yes	Yes	Yes

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is considered commercially confidential by his Department in relation to the competitive tendering process for private prison contracts; and if he will make a statement. [97733]

Mr. Boateng: The bids made in the competition, in particular any financial information, are commercially confidential as is any subsequent documentation directly referring to the bids.

When the contract or service level agreement is signed the details of the winning bid, including price, are put in the public domain.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the financial penalties which can be imposed on the managers of prisons are capped; and if he will make a statement. [97736]

Mr. Boateng: The contracts between the Prison Service and the private companies managing prisons all contain a cap on the penalties that can be imposed on the contractor. In the case of the successful bid for Doncaster prison, the cap is 5 per cent. of the annual contract value.

Financial penalties can be imposed for three reasons:

failure to meet performance measures in the contract, for which there is a cap of 5 per cent. of the contract price;

failure to provide an available place for which 100 per cent. of the payment due is deducted; and

doubling cells in excess of the permitted level for which there are different deductions in different contracts.

The first type of penalty applies both to prisons built by the Prison Service and then contracted out, and to those designed, constructed, managed and financed by the contractor (DCMF). The second and third penalties apply only to DCMF contracts.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* Prison Service managers can overrule the assessment of those evaluating the bids for contracts to manage prisons; and if he will make a statement. [97731]

Mr. Boateng: Bids are considered by an evaluation panel comprised of senior Prison Service managers. Recommendations of the panel are put to the Prison Service Management Board, which may challenge or overrule these recommendations. The final decision rests with the Director General, to whom such decisions are delegated under the Prison Service Agency Framework Document.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers are available to his Department to ring-fence funding for the recruitment of police officers; and if he will make a statement. [97739]

Mr. Charles Clarke: For 2000–01, grant for this purpose will be paid, following a challenge fund exercise, using the provisions of the Appropriation Act 1999. The bidding guidance to forces will make it clear that, under the challenge fund, grant will be allocated on the basis that it will be used only for recruitment over and above the number forces would otherwise have recruited over the next three years.

Crime Fighting Fund

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the new Crime Fighting Fund will be ring-fenced for *(a)* the recruitment of new police officers and *(b)* general front-line policing responsibilities; and if he will make a statement. [97738]

Mr. Straw: Money will be made available through the Crime Fighting Fund to recruit 5,000 more police officers over and above the number forces would otherwise have recruited over the next three years commencing in April 2000. £35 million will be ring-fenced for this purpose in year 1 with further sums being made available in years 2 and 3. The money will be ring-fenced for front-line policing. It is standard practice for newly trained recruits to be put on uniformed patrol.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Crime Fighting Fund will be distributed between police forces; and if he will make a statement. [97740]

Mr. Straw: Forces will be invited to submit bids to the Home Office for a share of the money. We are currently preparing guidance setting out the criteria which forces

will need to meet to benefit from the Fund. We will be discussing our proposals with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities before formally inviting bids from forces. I refer the hon. member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 4 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *298*.

Mounted Police

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police authorities in England and Wales use horse-mounted police officers as part of their regular complement. [98076]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Fourteen: Avon and Somerset, City of London, Cleveland, Greater Manchester, Humberside, Lancashire, Merseyside, Metropolitan, Northumbria, Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Thames Valley and West Yorkshire.

Staffordshire Police Force

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian staff were employed in Staffordshire Police Force in each year since 1979. [97767]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information on police officer and civilian support staff strength is collected at the end of March and September. The figures for the period requested are set out in the table; all figures are for full-time equivalents.

	Total Officer Strength [1]	*Total Civilian Strength* [2]
1979	1,978	589
1980	2,051	587
1981	2,096	623
1982	2,086	629
1983	2,080	639
1984	2,090	650
1985	2,066	665
1986	2,087	666
1987	2,113	670
1988	2,135	677
1989	2,164	651
1990	2,187	692
1991	2,217	749
1992	2,176	736
1993	2,179	734
1994	2,208	[3]—
1995	2,231	749
1996	2,209	754
1997	2,211	763
1998	2,292	866
1999	2,238	1,044

[1] Figures are as at 31 March
[2] As at 31 December. Figures for 1995 onwards are as at 31 March
[3] Not available

The powers of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to set police establishment levels for each force were removed under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. It is for the chief officer to determine staffing requirements within the overall resources available. This year, Staffordshire Police Authority has set a budget that will allow the force to spend up to £122.2 million—an increase of £3.3 million or 2.7 per cent. over 1998–99. This increase, along with the two per cent. efficiency improvements that have been set, should be sufficient for the force to maintain levels of service.

Future staffing levels are for the Chief Constable to determine within the overall resources available. However, the Government are making available additional resources, in a new ring-fenced Crime Fighting Fund, to enable the police to recruit 5,000 officers, over and above those that had otherwise planned to recruit over the next three years. Staffordshire Police will be able to apply for a share of this funding.

Female Prisoners

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female prisoners are currently being held in United Kingdom jails; and what was the average proportion of sentence served by female prisoners in the most recent year for which figures are available. [97718]

Mr. Boateng: The number of females held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on Friday 29 October was 3,405.

The average proportion of sentence served on release for female prisoners released during 1998 was 53 per cent. This includes time served on remand.

Information about prisons and prisoners in Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the First Minister of the Scottish Executive and in Northern Ireland for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian employees employed in the Hillingdon Division of the Metropolitan Police for the years 1993 to 1998 inclusive. [97616]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has provided the following information:

Hillingdon Division

	Police	*Civil Staff*
1993–94	[1]—	106
1994–95	424	119
1995–96	423	122
1996–97	435	120
1997–98	386	100
1998–99	399	109

[1] In 1994–95 Hillingdon Division was part of 6 Area. The Metropolitan Police District was then restructured into five Areas. 6 Area records of police officer deployment are no longer available.

Mr. Cleppison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were serving in the Barnet and Hertsmere division of the Metropolitan Police *(a)* on 1 May 1997 and *(b)* according to the most recent figures available. [97298]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that the information requested is not available for 1 May 1997, but that information is held for 1 July 1997, when 277 police officers were serving in the Barnet and Hertsmere division.

Barnet and Hertsmere has now been combined with the Golders Green and West Hendon divisions within the Metropolitan Police. Information about police numbers for these three divisions is therefore now held as one. The number of police officers serving in Barnet Borough on 1 November 1999 was 681.

Graffiti

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of the reparation orders made under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 were imposed in respect of offences relating to graffiti; and if he will make a statement; [97277]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the use of *(a)* reparation orders made by the courts under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and *(b)* reparation orders imposed in respect of offences relating to graffiti; and if he will make a statement. [97276]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Pilots of the reparation order under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 began in five areas in September 1998 and will run for 18 months. 829 reparation orders had been made in the pilot areas by the end of September 1999, the latest date for which figures are readily available. Information has not been collected centrally on the offences for which reparation orders have been imposed. However, the pilots are being evaluated by a team led by Sheffield University, one of whose reports is expected to analyse the relevant offences.

Non-custodial Sentences

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a breakdown of the offences for which *(a)* anti-social behaviour orders, *(b)* sex offender orders, *(c)* parenting orders, *(d)* child safety orders, *(e)* reparation orders, *(f)* drug treatment and testing orders and *(g)* action plan orders, have been made to date under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [97361]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The anti-social behaviour order, sex offender order and child safety order under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 are not criminal penalties. They are preventative in nature and are made on application, in the case of the anti-social behaviour order and sex offender order, to the magistrates' court acting in its civil capacity and, in the case of the child safety order, to the family proceedings court. However, breach of an anti-social behaviour order or sex offender order does constitute an offence.

A parenting order can follow a parental school attendance conviction under the Education Act 1996, as well as offences by children and young people or the making of an anti-social behaviour order, sex offender order or child safety order in respect of them. Piloting began in nine areas in September 1998 and 122 orders had been made there in all proceedings by the end of September 1999.

Piloting of the drug treatment and testing order began in three areas in October 1998. 144 orders had been made there by the end of October 1999. The relevant offences included theft, burglary, possession of class A drugs with intent to supply, receiving and handling stolen goods, criminal damage, possession of an offensive weapon, bail offences and driving offences.

Piloting of the reparation order, in five areas, and of the action plan order, in four areas, began in September 1998. 829 reparation orders and 490 action plan orders had been made there by the end of September 1999. Information has not been collected centrally on the offences for which the orders have been imposed. However, the pilots are being evaluated by a team led by Sheffield University, one of whose reports is expected to analyse the relevant offences.

Peacekeeping

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had concerning the implications for future British involvement in peacekeeping operations of ratification of the International Criminal Court. [97517]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) on 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *409*.

Police Manpower

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the total police strength, *(b)* the total number of officers available for ordinary duty and *(c)* the total number of constables for (i) each of the police forces in England and Wales and (ii) England and Wales as a whole on 31 March 1979 and on 31 March in each subsequent year to date. [97231]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 4 November 1999]:* Information in the form requested is readily available only for the years 1991 to 1999. Tables containing this information have been placed in the Library. The figures in the tables exclude all secondments (including National Criminal Intelligence Service, National Crime Squad, Central Services and Inter-Force units).

I will write to the hon. Member with information for the earlier years as soon as it is available.

Vulnerable Witnesses

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued in respect of evidence in criminal trials from vulnerable witnesses in accordance with the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. [97374]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Explanatory notes were published to accompany the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. The Government intend to issue comprehensive guidance for the purpose of implementing

all the recommendations relating to vulnerable witnesses in the "Speaking up for Justice" report, including the measures in Part II of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. The Government's implementation programme for all these measures will be published shortly.

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to implement sections 40 and 41 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. [97371]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) on 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *421*.

Probation Service (Computers)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has, at what cost, to upgrade the software used by the Probation Service; and if he will publish a detailed list of errors in and omissions from the specifications of the original software. [97549]

Mr. Boateng: The Probation Service uses a variety of software packages including e-mail, word processing, other office automation products and a national case management system. Because of plans to modernise both the Probation Service's structure and ways of working, and as new possibilities have arisen from recent technology, we have also decided to re-develop the national case management system. This work is in its planning stages and work to estimate likely costs has not been completed.

The software has been subject to change and enhancements over the past few years. The rollout of the current version of the Case Management System is nearing completion. Bespoke software of any degree of complexity often contains some bugs, even after thorough testing. The list of outstanding faults on the Case Management System changes rapidly as the Home Office, Probation Services and the Contractor work together to reduce the number of errors. The error list falls under the definition of Confidential Information in the contract with our suppliers and, therefore, cannot be published.

Corpus Juris

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) of 26 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *802*, for what reason the information sought is not available. [97566]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Following the reply to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 26 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *802*, it has come to my attention that Mireille Delmas-Marty, one of the authors of the corpus juris report, is chair of the Comité de Surveillance of OLAF (Office pour la Lutte Anti-Fraude).

However, in order to obtain further information about official European Community positions held, if any, it would be necessary to make inquiries of the European Commission, or of the individuals themselves. We have seen no need to make such inquiries, but it is of course open to the hon. Member to do so.

Released Prisoners

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to require that *(a)* local authority social services and *(b)* local police are informed when prisoners with a record of convictions involving the sexual abuse of minors are released. [97969]

Mr. Boateng: Under existing arrangements, prison governors are required to inform local social services departments and the probation service in advance of the release of any prisoner who has been convicted of, or has been previously convicted of, any sexual or violent offence against children or young persons under the age of 18 years listed in Schedule One of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

On the release of a prisoner who is required to register with the police under the Sex Offenders Act 1997, the prison informs the police for the area to which the prisoner is to be discharged, or, if this is uncertain, the police for the area of the prison establishment.

The Prison Service will be undertaking shortly a comprehensive review of its current procedures for informing other agencies of the release of prisoners, to ensure that it is able to fully support other agencies in their responsibilities for managing the risk that certain prisoners may pose to the public on release from prison.

Stop and Search

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to implement Recommendation 63, regarding stop and search provisions, in the Macpherson report. [97810]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published his Action Plan in March as the Government's response to the Macpherson Report. On the report's recommendations on stop and search, the Action Plan said that pilot projects would be established to test the practical implications of Recommendation 61 of the report (that all "stops" and "stops and searches" should be recorded and a copy of the record given to the person stopped). The Action Plan said that Recommendation 63 (that Police Authorities be given the duty to undertake publicity campaigns to ensure that the public is aware of "stop and search" provisions) would need to be considered further in the light of the pilot projects.

The Steering Group which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary chairs to oversee and audit the implementation of the Action Plan has approved proposals for the pilots (to be run in Hounslow and Greenwich in the Metropolitan Police Service, and in Leicestershire, West Yorkshire and Suffolk). Piloting will have begun on all sites by later this month and will run until the end of March 2000. Decisions will be taken on any new recording requirements and further consideration given to Recommendation 63 in the light of the evaluation of the pilot projects.

Immigration and Asylum Seekers

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers do not remain in the UK. [97891]

Mrs. Roche: The Government have made clear their commitment to remove from the United Kingdom those persons who have entered illegally and those whose asylum claims have been refused and who do not otherwise qualify to remain.

The Immigration Service has instituted a range of measures to achieve our commitment including the establishment of a specialist documentation unit to liaise with issuing authorities and the deployment of a dedicated absconder tracing team.

The Immigration and Asylum Bill currently before Parliament contains further measures aimed at ensuring that those who have no lawful basis to remain here do not do so.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost in each of the last 10 years of *(a)* welfare benefits, *(b)* medical and *(c)* education for illegal immigrants and asylum seekers in the UK. [97890]

Mrs. Roche: This information is not available. For information about the amount paid in social security benefits to asylum seekers in the last six years, I refer to the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley) to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Liddington) on 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, columns *154–55*.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for the speedy clearing of the backlog of asylum applications. [97888]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) on 1 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *58*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Portadown Attack

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Royal Ulster Constabulary officers comprised the inquiry team into the murder of Robert Hamill. [95357]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The RUC have advised that the size of the team investigating the murder of Robert Hamill varied as the investigation necessitated. It consisted of up to 28 officers, with appropriate supporting staff.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hours elapsed between the assaults on Robert Hamill and Gregory Girvan in Portadown town centre on 27 April 1997 and the attendance of Royal Ulster Constabulary scenes of crime officers at the location of the attack. [95355]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The RUC have advised that Scenes of Crime Officers were at the scene of the incident eight hours after the assault, though there were other officers at the scene before then.

Postgraduate Awards

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of students enrolled in higher education institutions in *(a)* Derry and *(b)* Belfast benefit from Department of Education Northern Ireland awards for taught postgraduate study in computer science/I.T. [97031]

Mr. McFall: The Department of Education for Northern Ireland's awards for taught postgraduate study are tenable only at the Queen's University of Belfast and the University of Ulster. The 1999–2000 full-time postgraduate enrolment position in Londonderry and Belfast is as follows:

Higher education institution	*Number of post graduate students*	*Number of DENI taught postgraduate awards*	
		All areas	*Computer Science/IT*
Londonderry			
Magee College, University of Ulster	327	7	2
Belfast			
Queen's University	1,899	25	9
University of Ulster Jordanstown Campus	595	5	2
University of Ulster Belfast Campus	60	0	0

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportions of Department of Education Northern Ireland taught postgraduate awards are allocated to each subject area. [97032]

Mr. McFall: For the 1999–2000 academic year, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) made available to the University of Ulster (UU) and Queen's University of Belfast (QUB), by faculty, the following numbers of taught postgraduate awards:

Facility	*Queen's University of Belfast*		*University of Ulster*		*Total*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Science	16	49	10	50	26	49
Social Science	5	15	4	20	9	17
Humanities	4	12	3	15	7	13
Bursaries	[1]8	24	3	15	11	21
Total	33	100	20	100	53	100

[1] Only four awards allocated by Queen's University of Belfast

The allocation of awards within each faculty is entirely a matter for each university. I am advised that awards were made for 1999–2000 as follows.

1999–2000 Awards—Queen's University Belfast

Facility	*Number*	*Percentage*
Science		
Computer Science and Application	5	17
Palaeoecology	2	7
Applied Environmental Science	1	3.5
Engineering Computation	1	3.5
Manufacturing Systems Engineering	2	7
Materials Science	2	7
Occupational Psychology	1	3.5
Opto Electronics and Optical Information Processing	1	3.5
Polymer Engineering	1	3.5
Social Science		
Town and Country Planning	1	3.5
Political Theory	1	3.5
Social Anthropology	2	7
Criminal Justice Management	1	3.5
Humanities		
English	1	3.5
Philosophy	2	7
Irish Studies	1	3.5
Bursaries		
Diploma in Information Management	4	14
Total	29	100

1999–2000 Awards—University of Ulster

Facility	*Number*	*Percentage*
Science		
Engineering	2	10
Toxicology	1	5
Maritime Archaeology	1	5
Geographic Information Systems	1	5
Systems Information	4	20
Food Biotechnology	1	5
Social Science		
Applied Psychology	1	5
International Business	3	15
Humanities		
Irish History and Politics	1	5
Peace and Conflict	1	5
Irish Literature in English	1	5
Bursaries		
Fine Art	3	15
Total	20	100

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what languages other than English have been used in advertising designed to convey the Government's message about Year 2000 compliance to ethnic minority communities. [97279]

Mr. Ingram: Northern Ireland, like the rest of the United Kingdom, has relied on the publicity material produced by Action 2000 to convey the message about Year 2000 compliance. Government Departments in Northern Ireland have produced little or no publicity material about the Year 2000 compliance issue.

Substance Abuse

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* statutory and *(b)* voluntary bodies there are in Northern Ireland which deal with substance abuse and rehabilitation; and if he will make a statement. [97455]

Mr. George Howarth: The Department of Health and Social Services is aware of 17 statutory and 34 voluntary organisations working in this area. These figures exclude organisations the primary focus of which is not substance misuse but which nevertheless may encounter such problems in the course of their work.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money is spent per annum in Northern Ireland on substance abuse rehabilitation by *(a)* statutory and *(b)* voluntary bodies; and if he will make a statement. [97456]

Mr. George Howarth: This information is not available in the form requested. However, a 1999 report on reducing alcohol related harm in Northern Ireland estimated that annual expenditure by Health and Social Services Boards and HSS Trusts on alcohol addiction treatment services was £2.9 million. Similarly, a consultancy report, commissioned to inform the new "Drugs Strategy for Northern Ireland", estimated that Boards and Trusts spend £1.4 million annually on drug services.

The Department of Health and Social Services awarded grants totalling almost £230,000 in 1998–99 to voluntary organisations involved in combating substance misuse.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what indicators are used by *(a)* statutory and *(b)* voluntary bodies in Northern Ireland to measure the success of programmes working with substance abuse and rehabilitation; and if he will make a statement. [97457]

Mr. George Howarth: No common standards or indicators are in place to assess the effectiveness of substance abuse programmes undertaken by the many statutory and voluntary organisations engaged in tackling the problem. However, a number of organisations take steps to assess such programmes ranging from client questionnaires to multi-disciplinary team evaluations. Funding of voluntary organisations by Government Departments is conditional upon the outcome of a rigorous evaluation programme every three years.

The new "Drug Strategy for Northern Ireland", published in August, sets out a series of objectives and outcomes in respect of four key areas. The Government will, in due course, publish specific plans as to how these objectives and outcomes will be met but organisations will be held accountable for progress through the drug structures and the action planning process. The new alcohol strategy due for publication in March 2000 will also include specific objectives and outcomes.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what level of co-operation there is between *(a)* statutory and *(b)* voluntary organisations working in Northern Ireland on substance misuse and rehabilitation programmes; and if he will make a statement. [97458]

Mr. George Howarth: Structures are in place to ensure co-operation both within and between the statutory and voluntary sectors to tackle substance misuse. The Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, comprises representative from Government Departments and their agencies, together with advisers from the police, Prison Service and Customs and Excise. Drug Co-ordination Teams exist in each Health and Social Services Board areas. These include representatives from a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations, and are responsible for developing local action plans to address local needs.

In addition, health professionals from each Health Board area work together on the Northern Ireland Committee on Drug Misuse. The Committee, which also includes voluntary sector representation, advises the Department on measures to combat the illicit drug problem.

A Drug Information Exchange Group, under the auspices of the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland, also provides a forum for co-operation and information sharing. A separate forum will be established shortly on alcohol misuse.

Following a recent review of alcohol policy in Northern Ireland, the Department of Health and Social Services intends to publish a new strategy in March 2000. The strategy will include recommendations about structures to facilitate improved co-operation.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money is ring-fenced by local health boards in Northern Ireland for substance abuse rehabilitation schemes; and if he will make a statement. [97459]

Mr. George Howarth: This information is not available in the form requested. However, during 1999–2000, expected expenditure to be deployed on alcohol/addiction services by each Health and Social Services Board is set out in the following table:

Expected spend on alcohol/addiction service in 1999–2000

Health and Social Services Board	*£000*
Northern	715
Southern	505
Eastern	1,400
Western	911

Social Services Personnel

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the recorded assaults on social services personnel during the course of their work in each of the last two years for which figures are available. [97275]

Mr. George Howarth: Information on recorded assaults on social services personnel is not collected centrally. However, I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) on 19 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *463*.

Prisoner Releases

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the offences for which prisoners released under the accelerated prisoner release scheme have been *(a)* arrested and *(b)* charged. [97704]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 1999]*: Seven persons released under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 have subsequently been arrested in connection with the following offences: grievous bodily harm with intent, actual bodily harm, assault, breach of the peace, affray, criminal damage, theft, handling stolen goods, armed robbery, possession of controlled substances, assault on police, and conspiracy to murder.

Concerning the question of charges, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *134*.

New Buildings (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what items of capital expenditure on new buildings for Government Departments in Northern Ireland are planned for the current and next three years *(a)* in the grounds of the Stormont Estate and *(b)* elsewhere in Belfast; and what is the estimated cost of each such building. [97779]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 9 November 1999]*: Whilst there are no plans for expenditure on new buildings, major works are planned for buildings in the government office estate as set out in the following table:

£000

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Stormont Estate				
Castle Buildings	1,403	1,007	—	—
Stormont Castle	3,621	3,281	—	—
Dundonald House	280	875	250	1,000
Belfast				
Churchill House	1,225	1,473	—	—
Clarence Court	366	455	180	240
Longbridge House	883	40	—	—
Londonderry House	350	50	350	—
McAuley House	851	—	—	—
Newry SSO	—	1,000	1,000	—
Hollywood Road SSO	—	1,500	2,000	—

In the event of devolution it may be necessary to acquire or fit out premises to provide additional accommodation for the new Departmental structures.

Prisoner Statistics

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons claiming affiliation to each terrorist organisation were in prison in Northern Ireland on *(a)* 1 January and *(b)* 1 November; and, of those remaining, how many he estimates will be in prison on 1 January 2000. [97824]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Information is held, for management purposes, in relation to the perceived paramilitary association of prisoners in HMP Maze, where links are clearly defined. Information for HMP Magilligan, HMP Maghaberry, and HM YOC is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Table A sets out the population of HMP Maze according to perceived paramilitary association at 1 January and 1 November 1999.

Table B sets out the equivalent future estimate at 1 January 2000. Figures at 1 January do not take account of those who may benefit from any of the temporary release schemes currently operated by the NIPS.

Table A (Maze)

Affiliation	*1 January 1999*	*1 November 1999*
REP/IRA	103	63
INLA	27	15
UVF	57	23
LVF	19	14
UDA	58	27

Table B (Maze)

Affiliation	*1 January 2000*
REP/IRA	59
INLA	15
UVF	21
LVF	14
UDA	23

Correspondence

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library a copy of the reply received by his predecessor to her letter, with annexe, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Irish Republic, sent in the second week of July and deposited in the Library on 13 July. [97780]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The document deposited in the Library on 13 July was a draft letter from my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Marjorie Mowlam), to the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs. This letter, with its associated annexe and in parallel with the domestic legislation which was at that time being considered by the House, was intended to give effect to the fail-safe arrangements envisaged under the Way Forward proposals set out by the British and Irish Governments on 2 July. In the event, those proposals were not implemented and the letter was not sent.

Roadway Arches

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what level of public liability insurance indemnifying his Department against claims in respect of injury was required in each successful application for arches over roadways made to the road service in Northern Ireland under Article 73 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 between 1 and 15 June; [97759]

(2) how many applications were made to the road service in Northern Ireland under Article 73 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 between 1 and 15 June for arches over roadways; how many such applications were *(a)* refused and *(b)* granted; and if he will list them; [97758]

(3) how many arches over roadways were erected between 1 and 15 June in respect of which no applications had been made to the road service in Northern Ireland under Article 73 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993; and what prosecutions have taken place for breach of Article 73 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993. [97760]

Mr. George Howarth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. Colin James. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from G. P. Fraser to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 9 November 1999:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked our Chief Executive to respond to your three recently tabled Parliamentary Questions about the erection of arches over roads. In the absence of our Chief Executive, I am replying.

First, as regards your question about public liability insurance, the Department of the Environment requires all successful applicants, who make requests to Roads Service to erect arches over roads under Article 73 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, to have public liability insurance of £5M. This level of insurance is required regardless of when applications are made.

Secondly, as to the number of such applications made to Roads Service between 1 and 15 June 1999, only one application was received. The application, which was for an arch at Main Street, Glenvay, was granted.

Finally, Roads Service has no record of the number of arches that were erected over roads between 1 and 15 June 1999 for which no applications were made under Article 73 of the 1993 Order. No prosecutions have taken place for breaches of Article 73.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97426]

Mr. Ingram: The amount spent on external consultants and advisers by Northern Ireland Department and the Northern Ireland Office in each of the last four financial years is as follows:

1995–96: £13,496,067

1996–97: £10,781,752

1997–98: £10,855,484

1998–99: £11,290,736.

Terrorist-related Offences

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *135*, concerning prisoners released under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, what constitutes a terrorist-related offence; if such offences relate to crimes committed in *(a)* mainland Britain and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [97778]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* As I said in my original answer, the offences were all committed in Northern Ireland. They did not involve the use of violence for political ends, including any use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear, and so I do not consider them to be terrorist related.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Highways (Spending)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the levels of spending on highways per head of population in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* each other county of England (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the last three years. [94012]

Mr. Hill: The tables showing capital and current spending figures for the current year and the last three years, where these are available, have been placed in the Library of the House. Both tables include Staffordshire.

Driving Theory Test

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend the driving theory test to promote greater understanding of the reasons for road traffic laws. [96639]

Mr. Hill: The test already addresses road traffic regulations. The question bank is reviewed annually, with new questions introduced to help ensure that learner drivers develop satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the theory of safe driving.

Road Accidents

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents have been recorded so far in 1999 involving motorcycles; and how many of these were also recorded in the category signifying the presence of oil or diesel on the road surface at the site of the accident. [96973]

Mr. Hill: Data on the presence of oil or diesel on the road at the site of injury accidents involving motorcyclists have been collected for the first time this year. Early indications are that the number of accidents involving motorcycles where oil or diesel was present is a very small proportion of the overall motorcycle accident figure. Full data will be available when "Road Accidents Great Britain 1999" is published in September 2000.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents have been recorded so far in 1999; and how many of these have been recorded in the category signifying the presence of oil and diesel on the road surface at the site of the accidents. [96999]

Mr. Hill: Data on the presence of oil or diesel on the road at the site of injury accidents have been collected for the first time this year. Early indications are that the number of accidents where oil or diesel was present is a very small proportion of the overall accident figure. Full data will be available when "Road Accidents Great Britain 1999" is published in September 2000.

Water Companies (Compulsory Purchases)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what powers he has to grant an extension of time beyond an original deadline to a water company to permit submission of its statement of case and list of documents in relation to an application for compulsory purchase. [97542]

Mr. Mullin: Rule 19 of the Compulsory Purchase By Non-Ministerial Acquiring Authorities (Inquiry Procedure) Rules 1990 enables the Secretary of State to allow an extension of time when it is reasonable to do so.

Railway Industry (Millennium Compliance)

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what reports he has received from Railtrack plc as regards their preparation for the year 2000 and the millennium bug; and if he will make a statement; [97272]

(2) what reports the railway industry has submitted to him on end-to-end validation of its computer systems for the year 2000; and if he will place copies of such reports in the Library; [97301]

(3) if Railtrack has reported to him on the completion of its end-to-end validation of its computer systems in respect of the year 2000 millennium bug; and if he will make a statement. [97300]

Mr. Hill: The railway industry, led by Railtrack, has for more than two years been undertaking a systematic programme of work aimed at ensuring the Year 2000 compliance of all systems needed for safety and business continuity.

Millennium bug readiness in the railway industry, including Railtrack, has been independently assessed by the Health and Safety Executive's HM Railway Inspectorate in respect of safety critical systems, and by the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR) in respect of business continuity systems.

ORR has received regular reports from both Railtrack and the industry body, the Rail Millennium Programme Office (RMPO), on the compliance status of the industry. These reports cover the status of all elements of the compliance programme including cross-industry systems, supplier certification statements, and the remediation programme.

Industry desk-top exercises have been conducted between Railtrack, train operators, London Underground and the British Transport Police to test working arrangements for the Millennium night whilst Railtrack have conducted Business Confidence Demonstrations to test the "rollover" of systems. ORR has attended as observer at selected desk-top exercises and is being advised on the outcome of the Business Confidence Demonstrations.

My Department receives regular reports on progress made by the railway industry towards millennium compliance and the position is reported by ORR at meetings of the National Infrastructure Forum, organised

by Action 2000. At the National Infrastructure Forum on 20–21 October the overall assessment of rail safety critical systems and business continuity systems was 100 per cent. "blue" i.e. indicating that the assessment has identified no risk of material disruption. A copy of the ORR report has been placed in the Library of the House.

Emission Levels

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the consent levels are for emissions from the Edmonton and Lewisham incinerators for *(a)* carbon monoxide, *(b)* hydrogen chloride, *(c)* nitrogen dioxide, *(d)* particulates and *(e)* sulphur dioxide. [97448]

Mr. Hill: Both incinerators are authorised under Part I Environmental Protection Act 1990. The following table shows the emission limits for the substances requested for each plant.

Substance	*The Edmonton incinerator (incinerators 1–5 and the clinical waste incinerator) Emission limit 95 per cent. hourly mean*[1] *mg/m*[3]	*The SELCHP (Lewisham) Municipal incinerator Emission limit 95 per cent. hourly mean*[1] *mg/m*[3]
Carbon Monoxide	100	80
Hydrogen Chloride	30	30
Oxides of nitrogen[2] expressed as NO_2	350	350
Particulates	30	20
Sulphur Dioxide	300	80

[1] For continuous monitoring the limits will be considered to be complied with if, in any 24-hour period, 95 per cent. of hourly average results are within these limits and no individual hourly average is greater than 1.5 times the relevant limit. For the Edmonton plant the limits are also for a single test, whether carried out manually or by instruments.

[2] There is no specific limit for nitrogen dioxide. A condition is used to limit all Oxides of Nitrogen as if they were nitrogen dioxide.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many unauthorised emissions, by types and quantities, there have been from the *(a)* Edmonton and *(b)* Lewisham incinerators since January 1996; and if he will make a statement. [97449]

Mr. Hill: The following tables give a summary of the total number of reported unauthorised emissions by substances for each plant since 1996. Further details can be found on the public register.

SELCHP (Lewisham) municipal incinerator

Substance	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total since 1996
Hydrogen Chloride	27	63	5	3	98
Sulphur Dioxide	—	1	3	—	4
Particulate	4	2	—	—	6
Oxides of Nitrogen	—	—	1	1	2
Lime	1	—	—	—	1
Total No.	32	66	9	4	111

The Edmonton incinerator

Substance	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total since 1996
Hydrogen Chloride	2	3	3	4	12
Sulphur Dioxide	1	3	1	—	5
Carbon Monoxide	—	—	—	3	3
Total No.	3	6	4	7	20

For both plants the releases would typically occur over a 2 to 4 hour period within a 24-hour reporting period.

The Agency considered all the reported unauthorised emissions from the Lewisham plant and was satisfied that no serious effect to the environment or harm to human health occurred as a result of the breaches. Following the hydrogen chloride breaches in 1996 and 1997 at Lewisham, the operator installed new abatement equipment. This has resulted in a decline in breaches.

The Agency has now required the use of a continuous monitor to control emissions from the Edmonton plant and prevent further breaches.

Private Hire Vehicles

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what actions he plans to take following the judgment of the Divisional Court on 15 October in the case of Murtagh and Carter and Bromsgrove District Council concerning the licensing of private hire vehicles and cross boundary operation; and if he will make a statement. [97274]

Mr. Hill: My Department is aware of this case, which we understand may be subject to appeal; in the circumstances, it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

Sewer Overflows

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to issue guidance to water companies regarding the provision of public warning notices at watercourses subject to contamination from combined sewer overflows. [97387]

Mr. Mullin: The provision of public warning notices at watercourses is a matter for local Public Health Authorities in consultation, as necessary, with the Environment Agency.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to deal with the contamination of watercourses by effluent from combined sewage overflows. [97388]

Mr. Mullin: The Secretary of State's guidance to the Director General of OFWAT on the environmental and quality requirements to be placed on the companies during the period from 2000–05, issued on 1 March, included proposals for a substantial programme of improvements to combined sewer overflows. Priority was given to tackling failures to meet mandatory water quality standards and to reducing aesthetic problems resulting from unsanitary and unsightly debris left when combined sewer overflows operate. The Director General will announce his determinations of price limits on 25 November.

Rail Passenger Partnership Fund

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the funding available for the current financial year in respect of the Rail Passenger Partnership Fund. [97568]

Mr. Hill: £20 million has been made available for the current financial year in respect of the Rail Passenger Partnership fund and the Infrastructure Investment Fund.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will report on the progress of successful bids under the Rail Passenger Partnership Fund indicating in each case the location and amount granted. [97569]

Mr. Hill: A decision on the first group of bids for Rail Passenger Partnership funding is likely to be announced by the shadow Strategic Rail Authority towards the end of 1999 or early in the New Year.

Caldon Low Line

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the eligibility of proposals to provide for the opportunity to retain an option of securing rail passenger services following the reopening of the Caldon Low line for freight. [97570]

Mr. Hill: To encourage investment in the rail passenger network we have provided the Franchising Director with £105 million of additional funding to be distributed over the next three years through the Rail Passenger Partnership (RPP) scheme. Sponsors of new passenger services on the Caldon Low Line which are not self-supporting could be eligible to apply for RPP funding. The Franchising Director would consider bids against his "Planning Criteria" which require that they should be consistent with our Integrated Transport White Paper and represent value for money.

Electoral Review (North Yorkshire County Council)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that the Boundary Commission completes a review of North Yorkshire County Council Divisions in time for the May 2001 county council elections. [97551]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The independent Local Government Commission for England decides the timing of electoral reviews within its periodic electoral review programme having regard to the Government's plans for implementing the Commission's recommendations. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions announced our current plans on 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *356*.

On this basis the Commission has scheduled the review of North Yorkshire County Council divisions to begin in the financial year 2001–02, with a view to the review being implemented on the normal election day in 2005.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has undertaken into emissions from landfill sites. [97620]

Mr. Hill: DETR has commissioned two projects on estimating methane emissions from landfill sites, the first being "An estimate of methane emissions from UK landfill sites based on direct flux measurements at representative sites", published in November 1997. The results underpinned a second project to develop a methodology for estimating UK emissions from landfill and to offer projections to 2012, published in March 1999.

Salisbury Transport Study

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was *(a)* the cost of the Salisbury Transport Study led by the Government Office of the South West and *(b)* the fee paid to its consultants W. S. Atkins. [97611]

Mr. Hill: The overall cost of the Study, which is due for completion March 2000, is estimated at £400,000, excluding VAT. The sum of fees paid to date to W. S. Atkins is £250,000.

Road Workers (Deaths)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people were killed in the last year for which figures are available while working on *(a)* road construction, *(b)* road repair and maintenance and *(c)* road cleaning. [97702]

Mr. Meacher: The number of fatal injuries to workers (employees and self-employed) reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 1998–99 is:

(a) road construction—5

(b) road repair and maintenance—1

(c) road cleaning—0

(These figures based on the HSE's provisional data for 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999).

Driving Tests (Waiting Times)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regional variations there are in the waiting times for driving tests and retests; and if he will make a statement. [97701]

Mr. Hill: Driving tests, including retests, can be obtained in the Driving Standards Agency's five operational areas as follows:

5 weeks in Scotland: 6 weeks in Wales and Western England; 6 weeks in Northern England; 5 weeks in Midlands and Eastern England, and 9 weeks in London and the South East.

Local Authority Housing Stock

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those local authorities which have disposed of their entire housing stock since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [97622]

Mr. Mullin: Seventeen local authorities have disposed of their entire housing stock since 1 May 1997. Details are as follows:

South Oxfordshire DC
Eden DC
LB Bexley
Congleton DC
Kerrier DC
West Somerset DC
Tewkesbury DC
Rother DC
West Devon BC
South Somerset DC
East Lindsey DC
South Hams DC
Telford and Wrekin DC
Worthing DC
Bath and North East Somerset Council
Allerdale DC
West Lindsey DC.

Lorry Drivers' Dispute (Claims)

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if all eligible claims relating to the most recent French lorry drivers' dispute have been settled. [97652]

Mr. Hill: We understand that nearly all eligible claims arising from the French lorry drivers' dispute in 1996 have now been settled by the French authorities. Claimants are under no obligation to inform the Government of the outcome of their case and so precise details on settlements are not available. We continue to work with the French authorities to seek resolution of the handful of remaining cases.

Planning Obligations

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the implications of the High Court decision in Jelson Ltd. *v.* Derby City Council for *(a)* the lawfulness of planning obligations requiring developers to transfer land to registered social landlords and the number of such planning obligations affected, *(b)* local planning authority practice and *(c)* Government guidance, with particular reference to Environment Circular 6/98 on affordable housing. [97754]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Government do not comment on High Court Decisions.

The Government's planning policy on affordable housing is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 3: Housing and amplified in Circular 6/98: Planning and Affordable Housing. The policy aims to ensure that large new housing developments incorporate a reasonable mix and balance of house types and sizes to cater for a range of housing need. It enables local planning authorities to negotiate the inclusion of an element of affordable housing in suitable housing proposals.

The policy is not affected by this decision, neither should local authority practice be affected, provided it is consistent with our policy.

Planning Applications

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the average time taken by his Department to decide planning applications which have been called in in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what targets he has set on the length of time taken to determine such planning applications. [97910]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The average time taken to decide planning applications called in by the Secretary of State in the 12 months to the end of September 1999 was 27 weeks from the date of call-in. The Secretary of State aims to issue 80 per cent. of decisions within 13 weeks of receipt of the Inspector's report and 100 per cent. of decisions within 20 weeks.

Speed Limits

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has (1) to increase the speed limit on motorways; [97946]

(2) to reduce the speed limit in built-up residential areas. [97945]

Mr. Hill: My Department is currently reviewing speed management policy. The issue of speed limits for all types of road is being considered within the review which is due to report by the end of the year.

Water Industry

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met leaders of the water industry; and what matters were discussed. [97902]

Mr. Mullin: Ministers of my Department meet water company representatives from time to time and discuss matters of mutual interest. Water UK, the industry association, has requested a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, which is being arranged.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of current levels of investment in the water industry. [97903]

Mr. Mullin: The Director General of Water Services publishes an annual "Report on the financial performance and capital investment of the water companies in England and Wales", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of Ofwat's efforts to ensure that water companies are able to finance the proper execution of their functions. [97947]

Mr. Mullin: This is a matter for the Director General of Water Services.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to ensure that the funding criteria applied to water companies will ensure satisfactory levels of future investment. [97948]

Mr. Mullin: The Director General of Water Services has a statutory duty to secure that companies are able to finance the proper carrying out of their functions. The Secretary of State has issued guidance to the Director General on the environmental and quality objectives to be achieved by the water industry between 2000 and 2005.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact upon employment levels of planned future reductions in the price of water. [97949]

Mr. Mullin: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 27 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns *871–72*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy).

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of water price reductions upon the provision of subsidised bill payment facilities. [98012]

Mr. Mullin: The determination of price limits for water companies is a matter for the Director General of Water Services. The Government believe that it is possible to deliver an ambitious environmental programme and offer reductions in customers' bills.

Under the Water Industry Act 1999, the Director General will become responsible for approving companies' charging arrangements, set out in their charges schemes; and the Secretary of State may provide guidance. The Secretary of State has published draft guidance to the Director General on the exercise of this responsibility, which proposes that water companies should offer a range of payment options at no extra cost to the customers who use them.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of proposed reductions in charges for water on *(a)* water company operations, *(b)* sewage treatment activities and *(c)* water company investment. [98140]

Mr. Mullin: This is a matter for the Director General of Water Services, who has a statutory duty to ensure that companies are able to finance the proper carrying out of their functions.

M4 Bus Lane

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of the M4 bus lane. [97773]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 8 November 1999]*: The M4 Bus lane is being monitored by the Transport Research Laboratory. Their reports on the first three months of operation show that all vehicles are benefiting from reduced journey times during morning and evening peak periods. Subsequent monitoring shows that benefits, similar to those achieved during the first three months of operation, are continuing to be achieved. Decisions on the future of the bus lane will be taken once sufficient operational experience has been gathered and comparable before and after monitoring data have been analysed.

Leasehold

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the numbers of leasehold *(a)* properties and *(b)* households for each local authority area. [97804]

Mr. Mullin: Estimates of the number of leasehold households can be made from the Survey of English Housing down to Government Office Region level as shown in the following table. It is not possible to make estimates for individual local authorities from this source owing to limits of sample size.

Number of leasehold households by Government office region, 1997–98 to 1998–99

	Thousand
North East	63
North West	540
Yorks & Humber	120
East Midlands	35
West Midlands	137
Eastern	125
London	433
South East	212
South West	107
England	1,772

Notes:

1 Estimates from the Survey of English Housing, using data from the 1997–98 and 1998–99 surveys

2 Like all estimates from sample surveys, these figures are subject to sampling variability

Road Users (Drugs)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues on the possible introduction and use of a reacting portable device for drug testing of road users; and if he will make a statement. [97927]

Mr. Hill: Driving while unfit through drugs is an offence and we are therefore working with the police and the Home Office on the development of recognition techniques and screening devices to help them enforce the law more effectively. When suitable equipment is available we would want the police to have the power to require suspected drivers to give samples for screening. This would need primary legislation.

Mine Water Discharges

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the locations in north Staffordshire where he is monitoring contamination of surface waters by discharges of mine water; and if he will list those which *(a)* have and *(b)* do not have discharge consents. [97799]

Mr. Mullin: The Environment Agency monitors the following sites:

Berry Hill Trentmill Road downstream at NGR SJ89264668

Berry Hill Austin Street upstream at NGR SJ89004645

Berry Hill Govan Road—pool at rear NGR SJ89654570

Berry Hill Adderley Green Brook rear of Arbourfield Drive at NGR SJ90554650

Berry Hill Adderley Green Brook confluence with Causley Brook at NGR SJ90304690

Berry Hill Adderley Green Brook at Mossfield at NGR SJ917045025

Sideway Farm—Chitlings Brook at NGR SJ88204268

Bucknall—Malthouse Road at NGR SJ90654715

Ash Bank—Causley Brook at NGR SJ92654725

Tunstall Park at NGR SJ86655190

Chatterley—Whitfield—Ford Green Brook at NGR SJ88055360

Chell Heath Road—Ford Green Brook at NGR SJ88305073

Silverdale Colliery—Silverbrook at NGR SJ82124667

Apedale Road—Lyme Brook at NGR SJ82554895

Cophurst Quarry—Lightwood at NGR SJ92404100

Cockster Brook adjacent to A50 trunk road NGR SJ89904370

Norton Green—Caldon Canal north of the Engine Lock at NGR SJ90205160

Norton Green—Caldon Canal south of the Engine Lock at NGR SJ90005140

Harecastle Tunnel—Trent and Mersey Canal.

Apart from the Harecastle Tunnel and Norton Green discharges, these emissions are intermittent, minor, or recent, and there is no proven relationship with any specific colliery. Monitoring has been instigated to assess the impact on receiving waters, and the only consented discharge to date is from Silverdale Colliery.

The Environment Agency continues to work closely with the Coal Authority to identify relevant sites.

Newsprint (Recycling)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he received a copy of the report from the Newspaper Publishers Association on targets for the recycled content of newsprint; if he will make a statement; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [97685]

Mr. Mullin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Environment received a copy of the Newspaper Publishers Association's Report in June 1999. However, since the Report was written by the Newspaper Publishers Association, it is for them to decide whether they wish to make it more widely available.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent advice he has received from industry representatives concerning the maximum achievable recycled content of newsprint; and if he will make a statement. [97684]

Mr. Mullin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Following receipt of the Newspaper Publishers Association's Report in June 1999, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Environment asked officials to discuss some of the issues further with the Newspaper Publishers Association. He is now awaiting further advice from the Association.

Newspaper Publishers Association

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he met representatives of the Newspaper Publishers Association in the last 12 months. [97686]

Mr. Mullin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Environment met representatives of the Newspaper Publishers Association in March of this year and in October in 1998.

Gatwick

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the recommendation in the SERPLAN report relating to the area around Gatwick Airport and Crawley. [97829]

Mr. Raynsford: SERPLAN submitted its Draft Regional Planning Guidance in December 1998. This was subject to a public Examination in Summer 1999. The Panel Report recommends an Area of Plan Led Expansion in the Crawley-Gatwick area. The Panel's Report, and all representations on the Draft RPG, are being considered with a view to full public consultation on the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the Draft RPG early in the New Year.

Education SSA

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the fairness of the allocation to Nottinghamshire County Council of education Standard Spending Assessment. [97870]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have sought to improve the fairness of the Standard Spending Assessments over the last two years. But we want to see whether there is a better way of determining the distribution of revenue support grant that is simpler, more stable, more robust, and fairer than the present arrangements for SSAs. We are pursuing this in the review described in the White Paper "Modern Local Government—In touch with the People".

Single Regeneration Budget

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the funds received from the Single Regeneration Budget by organisations *(a)* within the Doncaster Borough and *(b)* within Dearne Valley in each of the last five years. [98029]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The amount of single regeneration budget (SRB) claimed for each of the Partnerships in Doncaster and the Dearne Valley including estimates for the current financial year is as follows.

£ million

Partnership/SRB scheme	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000 est.
Doncaster regeneration Partnership					
Stainforth	1.238	2.85	1.261	[1]—	[2]—
Going for Growth	—	0.404	4	3.63	3.936
Northern corridor	—	—	0.413	1.296	1.746
Dearne Valley partnership					
Dearne Valley	—	—	0.338	0.754	1.133

[1] £12k
[2] £14k
Note:
Yorkshire Forward, the Regional Development Agency for Yorkshire and Humber, became responsible for administering the SRB programme from 1 April 1999.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97427]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Estimated expenditure on external consultants by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions over the last four financial years is as follows:

£ million

Year	DETR spend on external consultants
1995–96	70.52
1996–97	17.52
1997–98	13.41
1998–99	10.56

DVLC

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the DVLC is millennium compliant for all of its operations; and if he will make a statement. [98036]

Mr. Hill: Following the replacement of the vehicle registration and licensing system in October, all DVLA's mission critical operations are Year 2000 compliant.

Driving Instructor Tests

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the extent of delays by the Driving Standards Agency in arranging approved driving instructor tests. [98070]

Mr. Hill: The Driving Standards Agency monitors the waiting times for tests for approved driving instructors against a national 5 week target. Extra examiners are being deployed in the London area so this target can be delivered.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about waiting times in arranging approved driving instructor tests for members of the armed forces preparing for resettlement. [98071]

Mr. Hill: The Driving Standards Agency has received no such representations.

House Building

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* private, *(b)* council and *(c)* registered social landlord houses have been built in each of the last 10 years in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Greater London and (iii) the London Borough of Enfield. [98052]

Mr. Mullin: The latest figures are as follows:

Housebuilding completions

	Enfield			Greater London			England and Wales		
Year	Private enterprise	Registered social landlords	[1]Local Authorities, etc	Private enterprise	Registered social landlords	[1]Local Authorities, etc	Private enterprise	Registered social landlords	[1]Local Authorities, etc
1989	628	—	—	14,117	1,860	1,372	163,344	12,314	15,390
1990	593	87	48	13,795	2,137	1,961	144,849	15,625	14,625
1991	282	535	—	12,834	2,716	723	138,572	18,081	8,544
1992	529	136	—	11,361	3,946	249	127,020	23,418	3,650
1993	827	212	—	8,870	5,213	96	123,255	32,734	1,603
1994	832	227	—	9,222	5,764	280	130,066	33,823	1,321
1995	1,433	229	—	11,114	5,174	60	132,549	33,430	974
1996	670	256	—	8,152	5,793	35	129,278	29,582	576
1997	598	14	—	9,034	4,018	48	134,709	22,995	291
1998	247	153	—	9,407	3,459	37	127,457	21,414	289

[1] Including new towns and government departments

Rented Accommodation

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to include guidance in the modernised planning regime on the need for affordable rented accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [98054]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Government's planning policy on affordable housing is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 3: Housing and in Circular 6/98: Planning and Affordable Housing. In March this year, we issued a consultation draft revision of PPG3. We are currently finalising this revised guidance and expect to publish shortly.

Housing Green Paper

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Housing Green Paper will be published; and if he will make a statement. [98053]

Mr. Mullin: We intend to publish a Housing Policy Green Paper in due course. The Green Paper will build on our achievements in housing to ensure that everyone is offered the opportunity of a decent home and so promote social cohesion, well-being and self-dependence.

National Countryside Access Forum

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the members of local forums set up to oversee the National Countryside Access Forum; what are the terms of reference of these forums; and if he will make a statement. [98104]

Mr. Mullin: Local access forums have not been established yet. As explained in "Access to the countryside in England and Wales: The Government's Framework for Action", which was published in March, the Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales have been asked to draw up good practice guidelines on the membership, role and operations of the forums, and to ensure effective geographical coverage. The National Countryside Access Forum for England is advising the Countryside Agency on the guidelines.

Greenfield Land

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the total amount of greenfield land in respect of which (1) developers have been granted options, broken down by regions; [98065]

(2) planning permission for new development has been granted, broken down by region; [98066]

(3) applications for planning permission are currently pending, broken down by region. [98067]

Ms Beverley Hughes: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to publish statistics for new development on *(a)* greenfield and *(b)* brownfield sites. [98063]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Estimates of the proportion of new development on previously developed land are published annually in the statistical Bulletin series "Land Use Change in England". The next edition, issue number 14, will be published shortly.

Social Landlord Tenants (Discount)

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to adjust the right to acquire discount which is available to some registered social landlord tenants. [98272]

Mr. Raynsford: I will lay before Parliament tomorrow The Housing (Right to Acquire) (Discount) (Amendment) Order 1999 No. 3028. Subject to Parliamentary approval, it will come into force on 2 December.

The Right to Acquire scheme gives eligible tenants of registered social landlords the statutory right to buy the home they currently rent, with the help of a discount of between £9,000 and £16,000 depending on the area in which they live. The change will limit that discount to 50 per cent. of the value of the property where that is less than the flat rate discount for the area.

Under the current arrangements, tenants in areas where property values are very low could purchase for a very low or nominal sum. This was not the original intention of the scheme, and does not represent a fair contribution from the purchaser towards the cost of acquiring the property.

The change will bring the Right to Acquire more into line with the Right to Buy and offer better value for money for the taxpayer. It will also help protect some registered social landlords whose financial position could be adversely affected if a substantial number of eligible tenants of low value properties were to exercise their Right to Acquire.

We are also considering the introduction of a "cost floor" to the Right to Acquire which would be similar to that which operates under the Right to Buy scheme. This would limit the discount available to some tenants whose homes have recently been acquired, built or improved while ensuring that registered social landlords recover the amount they have invested in the property. However, the issues are complex and require further examination before we decide whether to go ahead.

Housing Capital Resources

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to announce the results of his Department's review of the needs indices used in the allocation of housing capital resources to local authorities and registered social landlords. [98270]

Mr. Raynsford: I am pleased to be able to announce the conclusion of the review today. There was broad support for nearly all the proposals set out in a consultation paper, which received over a hundred responses. Two key changes to the needs indices to be used for the 2000–01 allocations are: inclusion of data on statutory homelessness in the New Provision Indictor; and increasing the share of the private sector stock condition indicator within the Generalised Needs Index. The second

of these reflects the move to the single plot for housing capital when resources for private sector renewal will no longer be allocated separately. A summary of the responses to the consultation on this issue is available in the House Library together with tables showing the effect of these changes for each local authority. Members can view individual responses in my Department's Library.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the regional development agencies have prepared annual accounts and reports for 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [98271]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Regional Development Agencies' annual reports and accounts for 1998–99 have been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library. These cover the preparatory period prior to the launch of the RDAs on 1 April 1999. The Government welcome the progress made by Agencies and their commitment to improving the economy, skills and competitiveness of the regions. The Agencies are producing real benefits for their regions.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made on reviewing the local government finance system. [98338]

Ms Armstrong: The July 1998 White Paper "Modern Local Government—In Touch With The People" announced that central Government, in partnership with local government, would investigate ways of distributing revenue support grant that were simpler, more stable, more robust and fairer than the present arrangements.

Alternative approaches to grant distribution are currently being developed by a working group of civil servants and local government officers, which reports to the Central Local Partnership.

The White Paper also announced that work would be commissioned to simplify the system of local government capital finance. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) have now completed their research into two key areas:

(i) prudential indicators for regulating local authorities' capital expenditure; and

(ii) a non-statutory framework for the prudent repayment of local authority debt.

Taken together, the PwC reports propose a move from the present complex system of statutory controls to a new system with a greater emphasis on self-assessment and adherence to professional codes. My Department has not yet had time to fully consider the implications of the reports, but welcomes them as substantial contributions to the review.

Copies of executive summaries of the PwC research are being sent to every local authority in England and placed on the DETR's website and in the House of Commons Library. The full reports will be published shortly. As with the revenue grant distribution review, the proposed reforms will be considered by a joint working group of civil servants and local government officers reporting to the Central Local Partnership.

In order to allow for proper consideration of the options being considered by the RGD Review Group, PwC's work and the linkages between them, we therefore intend to issue the previously announced Green Paper on local government finance in summer, rather than spring 2000.

Scottish Executive (Concordat)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects his Department to publish a concordat with the Scottish Executive. [98360]

Ms Armstrong: The Department has now reached agreement with the Scottish Executive on the terms of a concordat between them. This will be published on 11 November, when copies will be placed in the House Library. The concordat will also be made available on the Department's website.

High Buildings (London)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the London Planning Advisory Committee's advice on high buildings and strategic views in London. [98359]

Mr. Raynsford: The London Planning Advisory Committee's strategic planning advice on high buildings and strategic views in London was submitted to the Government earlier this year. It follows up the proposal in Strategic Guidance for London Planning Authorities (RPG3, 1996), to review policy in this area, and builds upon research jointly commissioned by LPAC, the Government Office for London, English Heritage, the City of London and others.

The Government welcome this advice, which will provide an important input to the development of the Mayor for London's Spatial Development Strategy, under the proposed new arrangements for strategic planning in the capital. The Government do not propose to issue supplementary planning guidance in the meantime, but will take account of the advice in exercising their planning responsibilities in the capital. Planning authorities in London should also take account of the advice in the interim in preparing or reviewing their Unitary Development Plans and in the exercise of their development control functions.

The advice provides a useful assessment of the role, value and impact of high buildings in London. It also provides helpful and detailed policy advice on the assessment of high buildings, which should help to ensure that future decisions on such proposals are better informed.

The Government note in particular the findings that:

there is some demand for new high buildings, both for office and residential accommodation;

there is at present, however, no economic imperative in terms of unmet demand or evidence that the competitive position of London is under threat through lack of new high buildings, though this situation needs to be kept under review;

the existing character of London is highly valued; there is no need or desire for a radical change in the city's skyline in order to sustain or enhance London's image and status as a world city;

research did not reveal widespread general opposition to new high buildings. However, their location, height and appearance need to be carefully considered; individual high buildings can have a significant negative effect on the urban environment if poorly designed or located.

The Government therefore broadly endorse the principles set out in LPAC's advice, and consider in particular that local planning authorities in London should:

consult the Mayor, adjacent authorities and others on all applications for new buildings above the thresholds set out in the advice. (These thresholds will be replicated in the Order defining applications of potential strategic importance on which the Mayor is to be consulted);

identify in their unitary development plans (UDPs) any areas or locations that are considered particularly suitable for high buildings, taking account of the local context (including clustering of high buildings), potential impacts on particularly sensitive areas or views, and sustainable development objectives such as the need to ensure high levels of public transport accessibility;

indicate in UDPs the criteria against which they will assess any proposals for high buildings in these areas, consistent with those in the advice;

take account of the criteria set out in the advice when assessing proposals for new high buildings, including the potential impact on particularly sensitive areas and views, and in particular require that:

they contribute positively to a point of civic or visual significance (including a cluster);

they are of outstanding architectural quality;

applications are accompanied by a design statement and analysis of the urban design context.

The Government note LPAC's advice that the existing arrangements for protecting designated strategic views across the capital are generally considered to have operated successfully. It therefore reaffirms the existing guidance to local planning authorities to protect and enhance these views, and agrees that boroughs should also adopt policies to identify and protect important local views, prospects and panoramas. The Government intend to transfer responsibility for protecting strategic views to the Mayor under the new planning arrangements to apply in the capital. They do not for the present intend to designate any additional views, and do not believe that a convincing case has been made for the two additional views suggested for consideration in the advice.

The Government believe that LPAC's advice represents a balanced and pragmatic approach to the issue of high buildings in the capital which should help to ensure that London's needs can be met without compromising its unique character and urban quality. In particular, pending any policies that the Mayor may wish to develop in his or her Spatial Development Strategy, it should assist planning authorities and developers alike in ensuring that any new high buildings are directed to the most appropriate locations and are of the highest possible design quality.

New Deal (Communities)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when an announcement will be made about a second round of the New Deal for Communities programme. [98048]

Ms Armstrong: I am delighted to announce today that 22 new areas are being invited to bid for funding under the second round of the New Deal for Communities programme. The eligible areas are:

London:

Islington, Lambeth, Haringey, Lewisham, Hammersmith and Fulham, Brent

North West:

Knowsley, Salford, Rochdale, Oldham

North East:

Hartlepool, Sunderland

Yorkshire and the Humber:

Sheffield, Doncaster

West Midlands:

Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Coventry

South West:

Plymouth

East Midlands:

Derby

South East:

Southampton

East:

Luton.

In each area we are inviting community based partnerships to form, and take responsibility for, the regeneration of one neighbourhood of between 1,000–4,000 households. We trust that the communities, service providers and businesses will seize this opportunity to transform some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country.

Copies of the bidding guidance for round 2 of the New Deal for Communities programme have been placed in the Library of the House.

I am also pleased to announce the approval of the first of the long-term Delivery Plans developed by our pathfinder partnerships, 17 of whom began work last year. The partnership for Beswick and Openshaw in East Manchester have developed a robust strategy that promises to deliver real and lasting change for the area and its community. I am delighted to announce that we have today offered that partnership the funding they need to implement their strategy for change.

WALES

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02, the departmental expenditure limits of the Wales Office *(a)* as they were before the negotiation of Objective 1 status for West Wales and the Valleys and *(b)* as they are now; what amounts are available to meet that expenditure from (i) the block grant, (ii) local authority credit approvals, (iii) European Union grants broken down by programme and (iv) the private sector element of matched funding. [97699]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Departmental Expenditure Limit of the former Welsh Office (excluding Welfare to Work expenditure) was set at the last Comprehensive Spending Review as:

	£ million
1999–2000	7,097
2000–01	7,498
2001–02	7,888

There have been no changes arising from the negotiation of Objective 1 status for West Wales and the Valleys. This is a matter for the next spending review.

The allocation of funds within the block is a matter for The National Assembly for Wales.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Ministerial Visit (China)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the outcome of his visit to China earlier this year. [97979]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* I visited China earlier this year, from 27 April to 6 May. I was accompanied by a delegation of leading figures from the UK television, music and film industries.

The objectives of the visit were: to create among UK creative industries an improved understanding of China and its way of doing business, to outline to the Chinese what the UK could offer; and to raise the issue of piracy and encourage the Chinese authorities to maintain their efforts to tackle this problem.

The visit produced some positive outcomes which officials from my Department are taking forward in collaboration with the appropriate contacts from the business community. These include:

agreement from State Administration for Radio Film and TV to proceed with the idea of National Film and Television School (NFTS) student scholarships under which 4–6 top Chinese students will be given a bursary to attend a one-year NFTS training school;

agreement on developing ideas for greater exchange of television product between China and the UK;

commitment by the Ministry of Culture to expanding the cultural exchange programme between China and the UK;

possibility of running a festival of films produced by the Xian film studios;

agreement to the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) providing a training programme for National Copyright Association of China (NCAC) officials on how to deal with piracy;

the development of greater understanding of and commitment to the creative industries agenda by both the British Embassy and British Council staff in China;

a number of specific business deals initiated or concluded by BBC Worldwide and other companies represented on the visit;

and a greater appreciation of the benefits of a joint political/business approach to doing business in China—and an awareness of cultural events which also provide a business spin-off.

TV Programmes (Watershed)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport at what time in the morning the watershed period before which programmes unsuitable for family viewing are discouraged, ends. [97592]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Under the terms of the watershed agreement the hours between 9.00pm and 5.30am are recognised as being a time at which programmes are aimed towards an adult rather than a family audience.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the suitability for screening prior to the 9.00 p.m. watershed of programmes of United States origin depicting extensive use of firearms. [97588]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Responsibility for these matters rests with the broadcasters and regulators. The regulators are independent of the Government and accountable for safeguarding the public interest in broadcasting. They maintain wide ranging guidelines on the standards which should be observed, including the 9.00 p.m. watershed. These guidelines apply to programmes regardless of genre or country of origin.

Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team will publish its work plan. [98337]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team (QUEST) has been set up to identify, evaluate and promote good practice across the cultural sector. It works independently of the Department and reports directly to me. After wide consultation, QUEST has now decided on its initial projects. Details of these are set out in QUESTS's work plan, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if construction work on each of the zones in the Millennium Dome will be completed by 31 December. [97774]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Progress on the Millennium Dome remains on time and on budget. The construction and development phases for the Dome are nearing completion and the transition to exhibit fit-out is in full flow. All zones will be complete by 31 December.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the use of the Millennium Dome site after the closure of the exhibition. [95177]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* The Government is committed to identifying a sustainable, viable use for the Dome after the Millennium Experience ends and launched a competition for that purpose on 4 March 1999. The competition is proceeding

well and we are pleased with the level of interest that has been shown. Bidders have now provided their outline proposals and we hope to be able to select a final shortlist by the end of the year. Obviously, for commercial reasons, the identities of the bidders will remain confidential. The outcome of the competition will be announced in the summer of 2000.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on security arrangements at the Millennium Dome. [95120]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company has regular discussions with the Metropolitan Police about all aspects of security. By definition, it would not be helpful to reveal the detail of those discussions or of the security arrangements implemented as a result. I am satisfied that those arrangements are both robust and comprehensive.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what policy towards the employment of people with disabilities he has asked the operators of the Millennium Dome to follow. [95082]

Janet Anderson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has an equal opportunities employment policy. To ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to vacancies, NMEC is working with Manpower, the Employment Service and a number of specialist agencies. All applicants with a disability are offered an initial interview. They, like all other applicants for vacancies, are assessed on their ability to perform particular jobs to an acceptable standard. Where an individual fails an initial or any subsequent interview, constructive follow-up advice is offered.

Tourism

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the factors contributing to the fall in the number of people employed in the tourism industry in England between December 1997 and December 1998; and if he will make a statement. [97988]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Data from the Annual Employment Survey suggest that the number of employee jobs in tourism-related industries (TRI) in England rose by some 8,000 to 1.35 million between December 1997 and December 1998.

On the other hand, Labour Force Survey data suggest that, over the year to December 1998, the number of self-employment jobs fell by 17,000 to 130,000. My Department has asked the Office for National Statistics for their assessment of the reasons for this trend.

The latest figures, for the year to June 1999, show an increase in employee jobs in all TRI sectors and a reduction in the number of self-employed jobs.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97425]

Mr. Chris Smith: The expenditure information requested is given in the following table:

Year	£
1995–96	304,632
1996–97	448,931
1997–98	589,149
1998–99	381,634

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will break down the total cost of establishing the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. [97992]

Mr. Alan Howarth: £350,000 has been allocated to cover the costs associated with the establishment of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC) in this year and next. Costs are likely to include items such as legal fees, consultancy advice, the remuneration of the Chairman and Chief Executive until next April, travel and publications.

Films

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what his policy is on providing funding for films made and produced outside the South-East of England. [97297]

Janet Anderson: The Government is keen to develop the film industry and film culture throughout the UK and, where public support for film production is concerned, firm guidelines exist to encourage participation by people living and working outside the South-East. The British Film Institute and the Arts Council of England have co-financed projects with Regional Arts Boards, Regional Media Development Agencies and the Arts Councils of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Film Council will also have a responsibility to ensure wide access to its production funds when it commences operation next year.

Lottery support for film production is also channelled through the Arts Councils of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, all of which have remits to encourage the production of films which contribute to their respective indigenous film industries. This support will continue after the creation of the Film Council.

Television Regulation

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will make a statement on his policy towards the future regulation of programme output on *(a)* BBC1 and *(b)* ITV; [97591]

(2) what plans he has to improve regulation of satellite television providers. [97589]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Regulation of programme output on BBC One is a matter for the BBC's Board of Governors and on ITV and satellite broadcasters for the Independent Television Commission. The ITC are currently conducting an audit of regulatory burdens on commercial broadcasters. My Department and the DTI are separately about to undertake

a fundamental reassessment of broadcasting and communications regulation with a view to possible major legislation early in the next Parliament.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Home Office since 1 August regarding the impact of asylum seekers in seaside holiday resorts. [95909]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Officials in my Department have had a number of discussions with the Home Office on this important subject. Government policy will take proper account of the potential impact on seaside resorts and the availability of support networks locally when placing asylum seekers in available accommodation in these areas.

Sports Coverage (Terrestrial Transmission)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what developments there have been in the transmission on terrestrial television channels of major sporting events in the last five years; what representations his Department has received on this subject; and if he will make a statement. [97436]

Janet Anderson: The four terrestrial television channels which are available to over 99 per cent. of UK viewers have continued to offer high quality coverage of events across a wide range of sports over the last five years. Channel 5, which is available to 75 per cent. of UK viewers, has also offered extensive sports coverage since March 1997. Coverage of a number of major sporting occasions must be made available to the BBC, Channel 3 or Channel 4 under Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a revised and extended list of such protected events on 25 June 1998, taking account of the recommendations made to him by the independent Advisory Group chaired by Lord Gordon of Strathblane.

My right hon. Friend has received 2,948 representations on the subject of sports coverage on terrestrial television channels since May 1997, including 375 from hon. Members.

Olympic Games

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what his policy is towards holding the Olympic Games in the United Kingdom. [97985]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The Government are committed to supporting a viable Olympic bid at the earliest opportunity. The British Olympic Association, who have responsibility for UK bids for the Olympic Games, is carrying out a series of feasibility studies on a London based bid and will report to me before the end of the year.

Pirate CDs and Videos (China)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what agreement he has reached with the Chinese authorities regarding the trade in illegal copies of compact discs and videos. [97987]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* During my visit to China and Hong Kong earlier this year, I raised with the appropriate authorities both in Beijing and Hong Kong the issue of trade in illegal copying of CDs and videos. We agreed that such trade is not beneficial to the development of a healthy domestic or international market and that it infringed intellectual property rights, and I encouraged them to maintain and intensify their efforts to enforce their domestic legislation in this area.

Accommodation Rating

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the level of industry participation in the new harmonised accommodation rating scheme for England. [97476]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* Almost 49 per cent. of serviced accommodation providers in England have now signed up to the new standardised ratings being run by the English Tourism Council, the AA and RAC that were introduced in September.

This is an encouraging start, but we want more providers to sign up to the new schemes since we believe this will help drive up quality standards in accordance with the aims of "Tomorrow's Tourism". The ETC are responsible for encouraging and measuring take-up of the schemes and also identifying how it can be increased.

Millennium Commission

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding the Millennium Commission has currently allocated for flagship capital projects where the Commission contribution is £10 million or more in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Manchester, *(d)* Salford, *(e)* Liverpool, *(f)* Sheffield, *(g)* Newcastle, *(h)* Leeds and *(i)* Bristol. [97638]

Mr. Chris Smith: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will reply to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

SCOTLAND

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97414]

Dr. Reid: Expenditure on external consultants and advisers over the last four financial years by The Scottish Office, including its Executive Agencies and associated departments, is estimated as follows:

	£ million
1996–97	3.0
1997–98	2.5
1998–99	2.1
1999–2000	0.9

Figures for the current financial year do not include spending from 1 July onwards by the Scottish Executive, which is now a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Meat Exports and Imports

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent talks he has held with European Commission officials regarding meat exports and imports. [97928]

Dr. Reid: None.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Community Charge Non-payment

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people were refused legal aid in cases of non-payment of community charge. [97721]

Mr. Lock: Since 1 January 1999, the Legal Aid Board has refused 47 applications for Assistance By Way Of Representation (ABWOR) in respect of fine defaulters on the basis that they failed to meet the legal merits test. A total of 126 applications have been granted during the same period. It is not possible to break down how many of these refusals related to community charge (Council tax) cases as the information is not recorded at that level of detail.

Under the Legal Aid Act 1988, civil legal aid is not available for representation in the magistrates court for non-payment of community charge (now Council tax since 1993). Where a debtor appears before a magistrates court for failing to pay Council tax or to obey an order of the court and is at risk of imprisonment, legal representation may be provided by the court duty solicitor under paragraph 50(2)(b) of the Legal Aid Board's Duty Solicitor Arrangements 1997.

In complex cases, where advance preparation may be required, a solicitor may apply for an adjournment in order to apply to the Legal Aid Board for ABWOR under Regulation 7(4) Legal Advice and Assistance (Scope) (Amendment) Regulations 1997.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the implications of the ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Mr. Kevin Perks and seven other community charge protesters that their rights had been violated by refusal to grant them legal aid. [97719]

Jane Kennedy: The decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Perks and Others *v.* The United Kingdom is consistent with the leading case of Benham *v.* UK. Since that case, and since the events which gave rise to the application made by Mr. Kevin Perks and others, the law has been changed so that legal aid is now available as required by Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Government have noted that none of the eight applicants succeeded in their claim that Article 5 of the Convention had been breached and that only one of the applicants was awarded damages for the breach of Article 6. The Government considers that the judgment of the Court of Human Rights provides useful confirmation and clarification in relation to these issues.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if it is the Government's intention to appeal against the ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Mr. Kevin Perks and seven other community charge protesters. [97720]

Jane Kennedy: It is not possible to appeal against the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in this case.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much the Lord Chancellor's Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97419]

Mr. Lock: The information requested is as follows:

	LCD	*Agencies*	*Total*
1995–96	1,295,260	419,000	1,714,260
1996–97	452,948	1,741,793	2,194,741
1997–98	377,522	2,276,779	2,654,301
1998–99	827,891	3,065,635	3,893,526

Crown Court Trials

Maria Eagle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of defendants who elect at committal for a Crown court trial *(a)* in the Liverpool magistrates court and *(b)* in England and Wales subsequently plead guilty. [97887]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have been asked to reply.

Although statistics on pleas in the Crown court are collected centrally, these do not record whether the defendant elected trial or was directed by magistrates. In England and Wales, the Crown Prosecution Service statistics for 1998 show that 18,500 defendants elected trial in 1998 in addition to 47,185 either-way cases directed to the Crown court by magistrates. During the same period, 76 per cent. of all defendants in either-way cases pleaded guilty before the commencement of the Crown court trial.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Small Business

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the new measures he is planning to introduce to support the growth of smaller businesses in selected areas, as announced in the White Paper, "Building the Knowledge-Driven Economy". [98159]

Mr. Byers: I intend to allocate £45 million over three years for a new Enterprise Grant scheme for SMEs. This will complement the new assistance being made available in this sector for venture capital under the Enterprise Fund.

Support will be targeted at growth SMEs in tiers 1, 2 and 3 of the proposed new Assisted Areas map currently under discussion with the European Commission and due to come in to effect on 1 January 2000. It will provide SMEs with the opportunity of a selective grant of up to 15 per cent. of fixed capital investment on projects of up to £500,000, with a ceiling of £75,000 on the maximum assistance. The scheme will replace grants at this level currently available under Regional Selective Assistance in the English regions. The priorities for support will reflect RDA economic strategies for the region.

The scheme is subject to approval from the European Commission.

Consumer Interests

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance he has given to the Office of Fair Trading to ensure that the interests of the consumer are reflected in its operating policy. [97500]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The Director General of Fair Trading is independent of Government. His functions are defined by various statutes, notably the Fair Trading Act 1973.

As part of his response to the White Paper "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers", he is carrying out a fundamental review of his consumer affairs functions. The review will cover his objectives, his powers and liaison and co-ordination with other government departments and enforcement agencies. The Director General expects to complete his review early next year, and I look forward to seeing his conclusions.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that the interests of consumers are addressed within Government. [97506]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Our White Paper "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers" (Cm 4410) sets out a comprehensive strategy to ensure that the needs of consumers are addressed by Government. We are committed to strengthening the institutional framework for consumer protection. We are also developing new mechanisms to ensure that consumer interests are properly represented in policy-making, including a new advisory committee, which I shall chair.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to ensure that all Government decisions are subject to a consumer impact assessment. [97507]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The current system of regulatory impact assessments already requires an assessment of the benefits of proposals to consumers, as well as the regulatory costs to businesses and enforcement agencies. I see no need for a new and separate consumer impact assessment.

Credit Agreements

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to review *(a)* the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and *(b)* the Estate Agents Act 1979. [97503]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Last July I announced in the Government's White Paper "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers", my plans to review the effectiveness of the extortionate credit bargain and consumer credit licensing provisions of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. These reviews are now under way. I also invited consumer and business groups to send me their views on how the Act can be improved and I will consider carefully any responses I receive.

The Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to keep under review the working and enforcement of the Estate Agents Act 1979.

Trading Standards

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effect of differences in financial commitment by local authorities on the application of trading standards rules. [97499]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The Consumer White Paper (Chapter 7) recognises that some trading standards services, particularly in small authorities, face budgetary pressures, and reviews the consequences, including inconsistent enforcement of trading rules. The White Paper contains a number of proposals for addressing this issue.

European State Aid

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *656*, for what reason approved State aid to the sectors listed is not broken down by country by the Commission; and if he will estimate the figures for each sector in each country. [97228]

Mrs. Liddell: Although the Commission surveys on State aid contain information on assistance to each sector across the EU, this information is not broken down by country. UK officials are discussing with the Commission

ways in which the publication of data on State aid might be improved.

The detailed information is not therefore available in the form requested.

Toys (Phthalates)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Dr. Julian Braybrook, of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, chaired an Expert Committee on phthalates in toys, set up by the Weinberg Group; and if he will make a statement. [97462]

Dr. Howells: Dr. Braybrook chaired an independent scientific committee convened by the Weinberg Group. The remit of the committee, which met only once, was to comment on the initial opinion of the EU Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response he has made to the statement made by the European Union Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment on 28 September on the adequacy of the tests developed by the Laboratory of the Government Scientist, for toys containing phthalates; and if he will make a statement. [97464]

Dr. Howells: My Department wrote to the Commission expressing disappointment that the Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment (SCTEE) could not accept the test developed by the LGC in its current form and concern that the Commission had not encouraged further discussion to address the points raised by the SCTEE. Many of the points raised in the SCTEE opinion could have been addressed in discussions between the LGC and the SCTEE before any final views were published. We believed, and continue to believe, that by working together it should be possible to establish a test which could be used for enforcement purposes across Europe, and which would have relevance beyond the safety of phthalates alone.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role the Laboratory of the Government Chemist has played in relation to phthalates in toys and in *(a)* advising and *(b)* representing the Government on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [97460]

Dr. Howells: LGC, a privatised and independent laboratory, was contracted to act in an advisory capacity to my Department on matters related to the migration behaviour of phthalates. An LGC scientist has attended certain meetings when technical issues in respect of phthalates were discussed. LGC has also been commissioned by my Department to develop a migration test to measure leaching levels from toys mouthed by children, and to test products currently on the UK market. LGC has also been funded by my Department to participate in work undertaken by both the European Commission and by the so called Dutch "consensus group".

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to ensure that British children are not exposed to phthalates in toys and to support the temporary ban proposed by the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection; and if he will make a statement. [97465]

Dr. Howells: All the scientific evidence to date has shown that phthalates can be safely used and our research shows that toys sold in the UK are safe. However, it is important to reach a Community solution, particularly in the interests of consistency in consumer safety so that consumers across Europe do not remain confused and concerned. In the light of this, if the Commission does adopt the draft proposal currently under discussion, I would be willing to accept a ban on phthalates in toys intended to be mouthed. Regarding a ban through emergency measures under the General Product Safety Directive, this would be the first time that such measures were used to ban a product. The measures are there to be used where risk is serious and immediate, and given the scientific evidence regarding phthalates, their use in this case would, in our view, be inappropriate.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Dr. Julian Baybrook, of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, wrote on behalf of the Weinberg Group Experts' Committee to all European Commissioners against an emergency ban on toys containing phthalates; and if he will make a statement. [97463]

Dr. Howells: No. Dr. Braybrook did not write to European Commissioners, nor to any other bodies, regarding an emergency ban.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Dr. Julian Braybrook, of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, participated as a UK Government delegate in the European Commission's Emergencies Committee meeting on 14 July 1998; and if he will make a statement. [97461]

Dr. Howells: Dr. Braybrook attended a meeting of the Emergencies Committee on 14 September, at the request of the Commission, to present the migration test devised by the LGC. He has attended other meetings as scientific adviser to the UK delegation.

Commonwealth Partnership for Technology

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he will be taking to promote the work of the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Durban on 9 to 11 November. [97245]

Mr. Byers: The Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management's Report "CPTM into the New Millennium" is on the Agenda of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Durban from 12–15 November. The Department of Trade and Industry has promoted the useful work which the CPTM has undertaken since its inception in 1995. I endorse the call made by the Commonwealth Secretary General to Governments to support the continuation of its activities.

RDX Explosives

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 26 May 1999, *Official Report*, column *201*, on RDX explosives, what export licences have been issued since May for explosives containing RDX; and how many applications are currently pending. [97114]

Dr. Howells: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible, and place a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Energy Consumption

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will rank the sectors of the economy according to their percentage consumption of the UK's total energy, indicating the percentages in each case; and if he will make a statement. [97630]

Mrs. Liddell: The percentage of total UK energy consumed by each sector, in 1998, was as follows:

Sector	*Percentage*
Transport	34
Domestic	29
Industry	22
Services	14

The Government are committed to promoting the more efficient use of energy in all sectors of the economy, as part of their policy to encourage sustainable development. A draft Climate Change Programme, to be issued around the turn of the year, will set out a draft programme, for public consultation, about how the Government should move towards their goals for the reduction of greenhouse gases. The Government aim to present a balanced, equitable programme which engages all sectors of the economy and society in their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which sector of the economy he has identified as the fastest-growing consumer of energy; and if he will make a statement. [97629]

Mrs. Liddell: Since 1990, energy consumption has increased fastest in the transport, domestic and service sectors. The increases in energy consumption, by sector, between 1990 and 1998, were as follows:

Transport—up 10 per cent.

Domestic—up 13 per cent.

Services—up 13 per cent.

Industry—down 10 per cent.

Energy consumption fluctuates from one year to another, in particular with differences in temperature and the state of the economy.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the increase in energy use between 1990 and 1998 by (i) industry, (ii) the domestic sector, (iii) transport, (iv) consumer and (v) other; and if he will make a statement. [97631]

Mrs. Liddell: Energy consumption by sector between 1990 and 1998 was as follows:

Thousand tonnes of oil equivalent

	Industry	*Domestic*	*Transport*	*Services*	*All final users*
1990	38,658	40,758	48,635	19,217	147,268
1991	38,257	44,769	47,963	20,819	151,818
1992	36,535	44,067	49,355	20,959	151,916
1993	36,440	45,549	50,024	20,733	152,746
1994	35,167	43,947	50,253	20,638	150,005
1995	34,553	42,689	50,238	21,303	148,783
1996	35,817	48,118	52,212	22,349	158,496
1997	34,672	44,855	52,986	22,007	154,520
1998	34,966	46,041	53,567	21,674	156,247

Source:
DTI's Digest of UK Energy Statistics 1999

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which sectors of industry he has assessed as having substantial opportunities to reduce their energy consumption; and if he will make a statement. [97624]

Mrs. Liddell: Analysis carried out by the Energy Technology Support Unit (ETSU) indicates that there is significant scope for cost-effective energy saving measures across a wide range of industrial sectors.

Kyoto Targets

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the ability of small and medium-sized enterprises to make the necessary investment to reduce their energy usage to meet Kyoto requirements; and if he will make a statement. [97633]

Mrs. Liddell: Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for around one third of business emissions of greenhouse gases. The Government's initial proposals for the Climate Change Levy reflect Lord Marshall's conclusion that there may be scope for significant improvements in energy efficiency from this sector. The Government are seeking to design and implement the Climate Change Levy in a way that maximises environmental benefits whilst safeguarding the competitiveness of business of all sizes. The Government have previously announced that £50 million per annum of anticipated revenues from the levy will be used for purposes which include the provision of energy efficiency advice for SMEs.

E-commerce

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of forthcoming EU directives on electronic commerce; and if he will make a statement. [97960]

Ms Hewitt: The draft Directive on Electronic Commerce aims to provide a stable and transparent framework within which businesses and consumers will have increased legal certainty as regards their rights and responsibilities. Other legislative initiatives which are intended to remove barriers to e-commerce in the EU include the draft Copyright Directive, the Distance Selling Directive, the draft Distance Selling of Financial Services Directive and the E-Signatures Directive. The Government will continue to ensure that a coherent overall approach to the regulation of e-commerce in the EU is maintained, and is characterised by flexibility and an appropriate balance between the interests of all those affected.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports he has received that the RSA-155 e-commerce code has been broken by the Dutch National Research Institute for Mathematics and Computer Science; and if he will make a statement. [97942]

Ms Hewitt: I have not received any specific reports on this matter. The Department is, however, aware of the work of Dutch National Research Institute, and that of other academics, in the factorising of a single 512 bit RSA key over a seven month period. This, of course, does not mean that the RSA algorithm itself is insecure.

Organic Food Producers

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support the Government will give to British organic food producers at the Bio Fach trade fair in February 2000; and if he will make a statement. [97941]

Mr. Byers: My Department, through British Trade International, has invited the Soil Association to recruit a group of exhibitors at this edition of Bio Fach. In line with normal procedure, if the Association has by 15 December 1999 provided British Trade International with details of a minimum of 10 UK-based businesses who wish to exhibit as part of a supported group, we will pay to those businesses that are eligible grants covering 60 per cent. of their space and construction costs, up to a maximum of £2,300 per business. British Trade International requires the Association to canvass businesses based in any part of the UK who are exporting from the UK—whether or not they are its members. Whether any of those recruited are organic food producers is a matter for the Association, not for British Trade International.

Objective 2 Funding

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the non-inclusion of Beeston Rylands, Nottingham, under Objective 2. [97970]

Mr. Byers: My Department has received representations from the Greater Nottingham Partnership about the non-inclusion of Beeston Rylands, Nottingham, since submitting our proposals to the European Commission for the new Objective 2 areas for 2000 to 2006. As part of the domestic consultation, we received representations from Greater Nottingham Partnership and Broxtowe Borough Council supporting the case for Beeston Rylands.

My hon. Friend has also raised the issue with me personally. We are considering the points raised.

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received regarding the exclusion of Netherfield within the Gedling Borough Council area from the Objective 2 map for European funding; and if he will make a statement. [97869]

Mr. Byers: My Department has received five representations regarding the exclusion of Netherfield within the Gedling Borough Council area from the proposals submitted to the European Commission for the new Objective 2 areas for 2000–06.

Two of the representations were from my hon. Friend, who has also raised the issue with me personally.

We are considering the points raised.

Coal Industry

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the opencast coal mining industry; and what issues were discussed. [R] [97683]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* I have met RJB, the largest opencast producer, the mining unions and MPs from mining constituencies to discuss the range of issues affecting the coal industry. I have also indicated my readiness to meet the Confederation of United Kingdom Coal Producers to address issues of particular concern that would benefit from discussion at Ministerial level. I would expect these to include opencast issues.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with owners of power stations about their long-term purchases of coal produced in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [R] [97678]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Decisions about the source of coal purchased for electricity generation are a matter for the generators themselves. I have not discussed long-term purchases of coal with the owners of any UK power stations. My officials have regular contacts with all the generators covering most aspects of their business.

I have recently approved on competition grounds the sale of three coal-fired power stations and in that context I have had to consider competition issues relating to long term coal contracts.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Inoustry if he will make a statement on the future of the Scottish coal industry. [R] [97676]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The Government's views on the future of the coal industry were set out in the White Paper on the Conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation. Further detailed information about the industry and its future were provided in the Department of Trade and Industry's publication "Prospects for Coal Production in England, Scotland and Wales". We will continue to work to maintain fair competition which will enable the Scottish coal industry to compete.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps have been taken by HM Government to encourage the transfer of opencast coal production from road to rail; what percentage of coal produced is transported by rail; and what reports he has received regarding the efficiency of the rail services provided to the industry; [R] [97679]

(2) if he will seek reports from the rail regulation authorities about the efficiency of service provided to the opencast coal industry; and if he will make a statement. [R] [97681]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Transport policy is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. His Department publishes statistics on coal movements by rail, but these do not distinguish between coal sources or methods of production. I have been made aware of concerns about the quality of rail services

provided to the coal industry, and I understand that the industry has now made a formal complaint to the Office of the Rail Regulator. I have asked to be kept closely informed of the progress of the Regulator's investigation.

IT Projects

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the information technology projects currently being undertaken by his Department and agencies responsible to his Department, indicating the *(a)* start date, *(b)* planned completion date, *(c)* expected completion date, *(d)* planned cost and *(e)* estimated cost; and if he will make a statement. [98042]

Ms Hewitt: Central records are not maintained in the form necessary to answer this question particularly in respect of the Department's Executive Agencies which exercise delegated authorities for their own IT strategies. I have asked my officials to gather the necessary information, and will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Internet Access

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans he has to encourage flat-rate pricing to reduce the cost of access to the internet; [97995]

(2) what steps are being taken to reduce the cost of access to the internet through flat-rate pricing. [97971]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are committed to ensuring the wide availability of fast and affordable internet access and believe that competition is the best way to deliver this. We want to see operators responding to these competitive pressures by offering a broader range of internet tariff options to allow heavy e-commerce users and light users to choose the optimum package for their usage profile. There are no regulatory barriers to prevent operators from including unmetered tariffs in this range of tariff options. I have discussed these points with Oftel, BT and the Campaign for Unmetered Telecommunications and will continue to encourage operators to respond positively so that the cost of internet access can be reduced.

Objective 1 Funding

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the cross-department co-ordination of plans for EU Objective 1 matched funding. [96779]

Mr. Caborn: Objective 1 programmes for the new Structural Funds period 2000–06 have been prepared by the area partnerships. Responsibility for identifying match funding is a matter for those in the area who will make applications for projects to the programmes. The draft programmes should therefore include a realistic assessment of the opportunities to deliver effective projects, including the availability of match funding.

EU Regulations

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list changes since 1 May 1997 to United Kingdom law in areas covered by his Department's responsibilities which have been directly legislated by EU Regulations; and if he will list these regulations. [97950]

Mrs. Liddell: The Department does not collect this information in this form. All Explanatory Memoranda for EU Regulations covering the DTI's areas of responsibilities are available in the House of Commons Library, and the six-monthly "Command Paper of RIAs'" (Regulatory Impact Assessments), also available in the Library of the House, lists all EMs with a major impact on the UK.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures his Department has to ensure that British industry is not put at a competitive disadvantage compared with industry in other EU member states from the timing and implementation of EU directives. [97951]

Mrs. Liddell: Consultation with UK business is a key priority for the DTI, both when taking forward negotiation of EU directives and, once they are agreed, in deciding how to implement them. Such consultation concerns both the substance of any directives and the timing of the implementation. The "Guide to Better European Legislation", issued by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and made available to all MPs, is the key source of advice for officials dealing with EC legislation and this sets out the requirements for the completion of regulatory impact assessments to identify the likely impact of any legislative proposal, and offers practical advice on implementing EC legislation in an effective, timely and proportionate manner. We support initiatives to improve regulation such as SLIM (Simpler Legislation in the Internal Market), aimed at simplifying the business environment, and the Business Test Panel, aimed at improving consultation with business on the likely impact of selected legislative proposals.

Diminished Lung Function

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in establishing procedures to compensate sufferers of diminished lung function from the former mining industry; how much compensation has been paid to date; and if he will make a statement. [97814]

Mrs. Liddell: We signed the Handling Agreement with the solicitors representing the miners, which sets out the procedures for settling 100,000+ expected respiratory disease claims on 24 September. As at 31 October we had made bereavement awards, and interim and expedited payments totalling some £39 million.

We have developed a programme of screening spirometry to prioritise claimants proceeding through to the next stage of the process and to make interim or expedited offers where possible. 70 per cent. of the 43,000 live claimants identified in May have now been invited to screening spirometry throughout the UK. We expect to complete virtually all of the spirometry by early next year.

On 5 October the contract to deliver the full Medical Assessment Process was awarded to Healthcall. The first full medical assessments should begin in the next month.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in establishing procedures to compensate sufferers of vibration white finger from the former mining industry; how much compensation has been paid to date; and if he will make a statement. [97815]

Mrs. Liddell: We signed the Handling Agreement with the solicitors representing the miners, which sets out the procedures for settling the 50,000+ expected VWF claims on 22 January. As at 31 October we had made interim and general damage payments totalling some £45 million.

I announced in July that we had awarded a contract to Sema Group for the delivery of the medical assessment process. Tests began in September, six centres are now open, and they plan to have 12 centres in operation across the mining regions by January.

EU Copyright Directive

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultation he has had with the higher education sector about the implications of the EU Copyright Directive; and if he will make a statement. [97750]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* We have consulted a number of organisations in the educational field on the draft EC Directive on copyright and related rights in the Information Society, including bodies representing the higher education sector such as the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom and the Standing Conference of National and University Libraries. We have received many submissions from individual institutions in the sector as well as from representative bodies, and we fully appreciate their concerns about the draft Directive, particularly as regards its provisions on exceptions to rights for the benefit of users of copyright material. From the outset, we have seen these provisions as unnecessarily prescriptive and restrictive, and we are continuing to press strongly for greater flexibility in the Directive in order to allow a fair and reasonable balance to be maintained between the interests of rights owners and those of educational and other users.

Lord Archer

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) which inspectors previously assigned to investigate the case of share dealing in Anglia TV by Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare are involved in the present investigation; [97383]

(2) when he expects to receive the results of the further investigation into the allegations of insider dealing by Lord Archer of Weston Super Mare in respect of shares in Anglia TV. [97253]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 November 1999]:* Solicitors representing Lord Archer have provided details to "The Economist" of Lord Archer's transactions involving shares in Anglia TV and the reason why he purchased them. I have drawn this information to the attention of my Permanent Secretary. He will decide what action, if any, should be taken.

Departmental Inspectors

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what restrictions apply to the public disclosure of information on the nature of the interview, by persons interviewed by his Department's inspectors in connection with an investigation under section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986. [97363]

Mr. Byers: Inspectors appointed under Section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986 are independent and are masters of their own procedures. The Department published in 1990 general guidance in the Investigation Handbook ISBN 0–11–515260–1 and Section 179–180 of the FSA restricts disclosure subject to a gateway regime. Common law duties of confidentiality may also apply.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantities of reprocessed uranium have been exported to the United States since 1969; under what treaty arrangements such uranium was sent; and when such transfers took place. [96468]

Mrs. Liddell: This is an operational matter for BNFL and UKAEA respectively. I have asked the Chair of those companies to write to my hon. Friend setting out details of any such exports and will arrange for a copy of these letters to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mortgages

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to discourage the mis-selling of mortgages. [95818]

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of his meeting with mortgage lenders on Friday 29 October. [97504]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 28 October 1999]:* On 29 October I held a mortgage summit with the major mortgage lenders, consumer groups and regulators to discuss what can be done to tackle consumers' concerns about mortgages. It was a constructive meeting. We addressed consumer concerns about redemption penalties, endowment mortgages, tying in of insurance and other products and when lenders credit the payments borrowers make. As a result I was able to announce that there is broad agreement that consumers should be given a cash figure about the level of penalty if they redeem a mortgage early. I have asked the summit players to meet me again before Christmas with detailed proposals to meet consumer concerns.

I am taking early action to ensure that consumers are able to make informed choices to get the right deal. I will be laying regulations later this month that will provide a standard method for calculating the Annual Percentage Rate (APR), and for the APR to show the total cost of the mortgage loan over its entire life.

TREASURY

Tax Incentives

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tax measures to improve productivity the Government intend to introduce in the next Finance Bill. [98114]

Mr. Timms: The Chancellor's Pre-Budget Statement yesterday set out the details of the Government's intention to make the capital gains tax (CGT) taper relief for business assets more generous.

The Pre-Budget Statement included a range of tax measures to promote enterprise and productivity, which will be contained in the 2000 Finance Bill.

Inland Revenue Press Releases including details of the following measures: Employee Management Incentives; employee share ownership; corporate venturing; and the research and development tax credit, are being issued today. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Civil List

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the persons eligible for support under the Civil List. [97494]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* None. The Members of the Royal Family who receive moneys are prescribed in the Civil List Acts.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount each member of the Royal Family would have received under the Civil List in each year from 1991 had the 1991 figure been increased each year by the rate of inflation. [97498]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Details of payments under the Civil List arrangements will be provided in the Royal Trustees Report, which is due to be made by next October. Since 1 April 1993 the Queen has voluntarily reimbursed the annuities paid to Members of the Royal Family except those to Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother and The Duke of Edinburgh.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to review the arrangements relating to the Civil List; [97495]

(2) what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of the level of financial support provided by 1991 Civil List arrangements. [97496]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Under the provisions of the Civil List Act 1972, the Royal Trustees (the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Keeper of the Privy Purse) are due to report on the financial provisions of the Civil List by October next year. The report and its recommendations will be laid before the House of Commons.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if moneys allocated to the Civil List by the 1991 arrangement which remain unspent at the end of the 10-year period will be returned to the Treasury. [97497]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Under the provisions of the Civil List Act 1972, unspent sums remain available to meet expenditure in future years as Parliament determined and will be taken into account by the Royal Trustees in preparing their Report.

Kuwait (Gold Reserves)

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the Bank of England agreed to act as the depository for the Central Bank of Kuwait to lend part or all of its official gold reserves to the market. [97675]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* This is a routine commercial arrangement between the Bank of England and the Central Bank of Kuwait. As with all such arrangements, details are commercially confidential.

Computers (Taxation)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends introducing changes to the tax rules that will allow employees to make use of workplace computers for personal use without being liable for their taxation as a benefit in kind. [97913]

Dawn Primarolo: An exemption from employee benefits tax for the personal use of a computer supplied by the employer has already been introduced in Section 45 Finance Act 1999. It took effect from 6 April 1999 and effectively exempts computer equipment of up to £2,500 in value; where the value is higher only the excess over £2,500 remains taxable.

Drownings

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children between the ages of five and 18 years have drowned in the UK this year; and how many drowned in the years *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 1998. [97607]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 10 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many children between the ages of five and 18 years have drowned in the UK this year; and how many drowned in the years (a) 1995, (b) 1996, (c) 1997 and (d) 1998.

Figures for this year are not yet available.

The information requested for years 1995 to 1998 is given in the table below.

Drowning deaths, for ages 5 to 18, United Kingdom, 1995–1998

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Males	42	48	36	27
Females	7	9	6	5
Total	49	57	42	32

Infant Deaths

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the annual number of sudden infant deaths. [97714]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 10 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the number of sudden infant deaths.

In 1998, the latest year for which provisional figures are available, 284 sudden infant deaths occurred in England and Wales.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the advantages and disadvantages of rebating part of the climate change levy for energy-intensive industries. [97708]

Mr. Timms: Our aim has been to design the climate change levy in a way that maximises its environmental effectiveness whilst protecting competitiveness of UK firms. As indicated in the Pre-Budget Report, by increasing the environmental effectiveness of the levy, it has been possible to deliver bigger carbon savings whilst reducing the overall size of the levy from £1.75 billion to £1 billion. The Government is also offering an 80 per cent. discount from the levy for those energy-intensive sectors signing energy efficiency agreements which meet the Government's criteria. This discount will help protect the competitiveness of the industries concerned, whilst ensuring that all firms face some incentive to save energy at the margin. The carbon savings arising from the negotiated agreements will also make a significant contribution to meeting the Government's legally binding Kyoto target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the advantages and disadvantages of exempting key industrial proce[illegible]n the climate change levy, with particular refer[illegible] blast furnaces and electrolysis. [97706]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the Pre-Budget Report issued by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 9 November 1999, *Official Report*, columns 883-906, which sets out the Government's policy in respect of the exemption from Climate Change Levy on both electrolysis and coke used in blast furnaces.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends the climate change levy on liquified petroleum gas to be fully balanced by excise duties on hydrocarbon oils. [96898]

Mr. Timms: The rate of excise duty on fuel oil and gas oil is already higher than the illustrative rates of climate change levy shown in the Customs and Excise consultation document issued on 9 March.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons he intends to exempt kerosene from the climate change levy. [96897]

Mr. Timms: Climate change levy is not being charged on kerosene or other hydrocarbon oils because they are already within the scope of an existing taxation regime. In the existing regime, however, kerosene is charged at a nil rate because it is heavily used in central heating systems by domestic consumers. For social policy reasons, the Government has made it clear that it does not wish to increase taxation on domestic fuels.

Electrolytic Processes

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to implement the draft European Energy Products Directive, Article 13, in granting exemptions to electrolytic processes; and if he will make a statement. [97628]

Mr. Timms: The draft European Energy Products Directive was proposed in March 1997 and is currently under discussion in the relevant technical working group of the European Council. Progress has been slow and a number of issues remain to be resolved. Until such time as adoption of the proposal is agreed member states are free to implement national energy tax policies as they see fit and there are currently no plans for formal adoption of any part of the proposal.

Gold Sales

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from governors of central banks in Europe over the limiting of gold sales. [97561]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

EU Budget

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) of 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*, on the EU Budget, if he will convert into sterling, the figures contained in his answer. [97806]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is set out in the following tables. The amounts shown in sterling have been converted from European Currency Units using the annual average exchange rate for 1997 quoted by the Bank of England.

Contributions to and receipts from the EC Budget in 1997

	Gross contribution (£ million)	*Receipts (£ million)*	*Net contribution/receipt[1] (£ million)*	*Population (millions)*	*Number of households (millions)*	*Gross contribution per head (£)*
Belgium	2,047.8	1,365.7	682.1	10.2	4.0	200.9
Denmark	1,037.8	1,054.3	−16.5	5.2	2.3	197.8
Germany	14,622.5	6,884.4	7,738.2	82.1	35.2	178.1

Contributions to and receipts from the EC Budget in 1997

	Gross contribution (£ million)	*Receipts (£ million)*	*Net contribution/receipt[1] (£ million)*	*Population (millions)*	*Number of households (millions)*	*Gross contribution per head (£)*
Greece	812.1	3,702.5	−2,890.4	10.5	3.2	77.1
Spain	3,699.2	7,731.3	−4,032.1	39.3	11.8	94.1
France	9,087.5	8,408.6	678.8	58.6	21.5	155.1
Ireland	473.4	2,281.6	−1,808.2	3.6	1.0	132.1
Italy	5,973.2	5,750.5	222.7	57.4	19.9	104.1
Luxembourg	117.6	73.1	44.5	0.4	0.1	286.1
Netherlands	3,334.0	1,715.3	1,618.7	15.5	6.2	214.6
Austria	1,454.4	908.1	546.4	8.1	3.0	179.6
Portugal	742.8	2,543.1	−1,800.4	9.9	3.1	75.4
Finland	733.4	736.6	−3.2	5.1	2.0	143.1
Sweden	1,603.0	757.5	845.5	8.9	3.8	179.7
UK	6,151.6	4,887.8	1,263.8	59.0	22.4	104.3

	Gross contribution per household (£)	*Receipts per head (£)*	*Receipts per household (£)*	*Net contribution per head (£)*	*Net contribution per household (£)*
Belgium	518.0	134.0	345.5	66.9	172.5
Denmark	4,564	200.9	463.6	−3.2	−7.3
Germany	414.9	83.9	195.3	94.3	219.5
Greece	253.5	351.6	1,155.6	−274.5	−902.1
Spain	312.5	196.7	653.2	−102.6	−340.7
France	421.8	143.5	390.3	11.6	31.5
Ireland	460.1	636.6	2,217.3	−504.5	−1,757.2
Italy	300.0	100.2	288.8	3.9	11.2
Luxembourg	811.0	177.9	504.3	108.2	306.8
Netherlands	541.1	110.4	278.4	104.2	262.7
Austria	482.7	112.1	301.4	67.5	181.3
Portugal	236.1	258.0	808.4	−182.7	−572.3
Finland	360.0	143.7	361.6	−0.6	−1.6
Sweden	418.5	84.9	197.8	94.8	220.7
UK	274.4	82.8	218.0	21.4	56.4

[1] (-) denotes net recipient

Notes:

1. The Court of Auditors uses ecu figures, the unit of account for the EC Budget.
2. Gross contribution figures are after account has been taken of the UK's abatement (including corrections in respect of earlier years) and for adjustments to VAT and GNP-based contributions in respect of earlier years.
3. Receipts figures include European Commission payments made direct to the member state's private sector.
4. The Court of Auditors Report odes not allocate all Community spending to the member states so that the receipts figures in the table may not represent the full amount of expenditure by the Commission in each member state. Consequently the figures for net contributions/net benefits in the table are likely only to be indicative of the amount of member states' net positions. For example, if all administrative expenditure were allocated to the country in which is it paid, the net position of Belgium and Luxembourg would be substantially improved.
5. Figures converted from ECU using the annual average exchange rate (1.4510) for 1997 quoted by the Bank of England.

Sources:

Contributions and receipts data taken from Court of Auditors Report on 1997 Community Budget.
Population data, relating to 1997, taken from the European Commission's document "European Economy".
Information on number of households relations to 1991, the latest available, and is taken from the Eurostat yearbook 1997.

Treasury Building

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the improvements to the Treasury building to be achieved through the proposed PFI scheme. [97596]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Extensive structural and remedial work is required to preserve and improve this important and historic Grade II* listed building, and to secure its future for at least the next 35 years. This will be its first major refurbishment in almost 100 years. The safety systems require major updating, as do all the other services. The deal will provide modern, efficient, serviced office accommodation for the Treasury to meet its business needs as it approached the 21st Century, and represents good value for money for the taxpayer. Payment to Exchequer Partnership plc(EP) for the serviced accommodation will only be on delivery. If any of the accommodation is at any time unavailable, or services are not delivered to previously specified standards, then EP will suffer financial penalties. EP are required to ensure that the building is to be comparable with current best practice in respect of environmental standards, and to comply full with the Government's "green" policies, particularly energy targets.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on *(a)* maintaining, *(b)* decorating and *(c)* otherwise improving the Treasury building since 1 May 1997. [97595]

Miss Melanie Johnson: *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Given the forthcoming PFI refurbishment project, spending in recent years has been confined to essential maintenance work, and to meeting health and safety requirements.

Figures for the last four complete financial years are as follows:

£

	Maintenance	*[1]Decoration*
1995–96	[2]1,725,000	—
1996–97	633,000	—
1997–98	1,117,000	—
1998–99	869,000	47,000

[1] Decorating costs incurred by HMT prior to 1998–99 were not separately recorded and are included in the maintenance figures. Decorating costs incurred by other occupiers of the building are not available

[2] Includes works service charge levied by Property Holdings (now PACE) to cover major maintenance work. This charge was discontinued from 1996–97 when HMT took over responsibility for running the building

The money has been spent on a variety of measures, principally planned preventive maintenance on the mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems; renewing parts of the electricity distribution system; prevention of water penetration; strengthening of basement vaults and fees to our facilities management company. No other improvements have been made to the building in recent years.

Money Laundering

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the problems posed by anonymous numbered bank accounts in dealing with large-scale purveyors of drugs and the financing of the provision of chemical precursors to those who process coca leaves and other raw materials for drugs. [96885]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Anonymous bank accounts, and other forms of excessive bank secrecy, provide an opportunity for criminals—including drug traffickers—to launder the proceeds of their crimes, to prevent law enforcement authorities from tracing criminal assets. The National Criminal Intelligence Service and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF, the leading international anti-money laundering body) confirm that anonymous numbered bank accounts remain one of the tools used by money launderers.

The Government is committed to furthering international efforts to ensure that banking secrecy is not abused to benefit those who trade in illegal drugs. The FATF's international standards on money laundering call on all states to prohibit the use of anonymous accounts. All FATF members, aside from Austria, have done so. The UK Government are actively supporting a variety of initiatives through, for example, the EU, the UN and the G7/8, as well as through bilateral relations with other countries, and through our relationship with the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, to ensure that the FATF's anti-money laundering standards are applied throughout the world. The Financial Services and Markets Bill provides new powers and responsibilities to the Financial Services Authority to combat money laundering in the UK.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97415]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Treasury has spent the following amounts on consultants and advisers since 1996–97.

Year	£
1996–97	923,662
1997–98	976,971
1998–99	1,757,400
1999–2000 to date	1,053,758

The increase in consultancies in 1998–99 is mainly the result of the transfer to the Treasury of DTI's Insurance Directorate and the creation of the Debt Management Office (which combined accounted for approximately £950,000).

Tourist Tax

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a tourist tax on popular tourist attractions. [98034]

Mr. Timms: The Government have no such plans.

EMU and EU (Public Opinion)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what opinion research the Treasury has commissioned on attitudes to economic and monetary union and the European Union; which polling organisations have been awarded contracts for such research; when such contracts were awarded; and what the costs of such contracts have been. [97769]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Treasury has commissioned no such research.

HEALTH

Nurses

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses returned to employment in the National Health Service *(a)* in the first two quarters of 1997, *(b)* in the first two quarters of 1998 and *(c)* in the first two quarters of 1999. [93132]

Mr. Denham: Since our national recruitment campaign began on 1 February 1999, until 30 September 1999, 2,030 nurses returned to employment in the National Health Service.

We do not hold figures centrally on the number of nurses who returned to employment in the NHS in 1997 and 1998. Information about the number of nurses joining the NHS is available from the annual survey conducted by the Office of Manpower Economics, on behalf of the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health

Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine. The results from the March 1998 survey are in the sixteenth review body report which is available in the Library.

2,327 nurses were on return to practice courses or booked on to forthcoming return to practice courses.

Medical Accidents

Mr. Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to set targets for the NHS for the reduction in the number of avoidable medical accidents. [93652]

Ms Stuart: It is, of course, important that patients should feel confident that they can rely on the National Health Service to provide the best care and treatment possible. We are committed to improving clinical standards across the board, and that is what our reforms of the National Health Service, including the introduction of clinical governance and the new statutory duty of quality, are doing. One of the aims is that, as standards are driven up, so medical accidents will be reduced.

Continuing Care Beds

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to establish national eligibility criteria for continuing care beds in NHS hospitals. [95558]

Mr. Denham: We are reviewing continuing care policy and guidance and will announce the outcome of our review next year.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what data his Department has collated from the English health authorities as to the impact on their drugs budgets of the recent shortages and rising prices of generic drugs over the last 12 months; and if he will publish such information as he has received; [96171]

(2) what assessment he has made of the anticipated impact on the NHS drugs budget of *(a)* the shortage and *(b)* rising prices of generic drugs over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [96172]

Mr. Denham: Our best estimate is that the combined effect on this year's drugs budget of price increases and the need to dispense more expensive drugs when cheaper generics are in short supply is of the order of £160 million, around 0.5 per cent. of the total resources allocated to health authorities this year. While the National Health Service should be able to cope with such pressures, it is clear that the arrangements for the supply of generic medicines which have served the NHS well for many years have failed us this year. We have taken action on three fronts. First, we are seeking to improve the situation in the short term by making changes to the present arrangements—for example the rules which determine for the purposes of paying pharmacies whether a generic is in short supply. Second, we asked the Office of Fair Trading in August to investigate whether the current situation raises any competition issues. Third, we are setting up a fundamental review of the current arrangements to see whether there are alternative ways of supplying the NHS with generics which would better ensure consistency of supply at reasonable prices.

Insulin Pens

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the prescribing of pen needles and disposable pens for insulin-dependent diabetics. [R] [96030]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *747*.

Thyroxine

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* for each of the last five years the amount the NHS has paid, and *(b)* the amount it expects to pay in this financial year, for the drug thyroxine; what the unit price was, or is, in each of those years; and what reasons underlay the changes. [96445]

Mr. Denham: The data requested are shown in the tables.

The amount which the National Health Service pays for any medicine depends on the total quantity prescribed and the price. In the case of thyroxine, the quantity prescribed generically has increased in recent years and during this one. As regards price, the price which the NHS pays for thyroxine, as for other generic medicines, is based on prices which are set by competition in the market place. It is not controlled by government. There has been a spate of shortages of generic medicines during 1999 which have led to price rises, some of which have been dramatic. The increases in the prices of thyroxine tablets have been at the upper end of this range.

The total cost of thyroxine for the rest of the financial year will depend on price and volume trends in the coming months.

The net ingredient cost for thyroxine sodium preparations dispensed in the community, 1994 to 1998, and 1999 (January to June) England

£000

Drug name	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Eltroxin Tab 50mcg	53.0	46.9	42.1	54.6	48.8	21.8
Eltroxin Tab 100mcg	45.3	39.9	36.0	41.7	37.8	17.4
Thyroxine Sod Tab 100mcg	341.9	338.1	350.8	456.7	992.6	3,739.6
Thyroxine Sod Tab 50mcg	402.7	392.9	405.4	548.7	1,088.7	2,637.4
Thyroxine Sod Tab 25mcg	457.2	625.4	1,069.3	1,404.5	1,668.9	1,536.2
Thyroxine Sod Oral Liq @spec	11.1	—	—	—	—	—
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 75mcg/5ml	—	2.7	3.3	—	—	—
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 50mcg/5ml	—	9.5	11.9	18.7	18.2	13.1
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 100mcg/5ml	—	5.1	9.6	10.4	18.1	11.2
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 125mcg/5ml	—	4.5	5.1	7.2	11.7	5.1

The net ingredient cost for thyroxine sodium preparations dispensed in the community, 1994 to 1998, and 1999 (January to June)
England

£000

Drug name	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 25mcg/5ml	—	5.2	4.9	6.9	7.9	3.2
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 150mcg/5ml	—	—	—	1.8	2.0	—
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 250mcg/5ml	—	—	—	2.8	2.7	—
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 200mcg/5ml	—	—	—	1.9	—	—
Total	1,324.7	1,482.7	1,958.1	2,579.9	3,931.8	8,014.8

Notes:
1. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed in the community, ie by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England.
2. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of a drug and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income.
3. For reasons of confidentiality, any individual preparation where less than 50 prescription items were dispensed is excluded. However the total includes all preparations dispensed.

The net ingredient cost per quantity for thyroxine sodium preparations dispensed in the community, 1994 to 1998, and 1999 (January to June)
England

£

Drug name	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Eltroxin Tab 50mcg	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.005	0.006	0.006
Eltroxin Tab 100mcg	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.006	0.006	0.006
Thyroxine Sod Tab 100mcg	0.003	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.006	0.042
Thyroxine Sod Tab 50mcg	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.003	0.005	0.025
Thyroxine Sod Tab 25mcg	0.009	0.010	0.014	0.016	0.016	0.027
Thyroxine Sod Oral Liq @spec	0.275	—	—	—	—	—
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 75mcg/5ml	—	0.176	0.260	—	—	—
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 50mcg/5ml	—	0.294	0.287	0.305	0.223	0.240
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 100mcg/5ml	—	0.301	0.234	0.249	0.272	0.280
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 125mcg/5ml	—	0.607	0.418	0.352	0.482	0.507
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 25mcg/5ml	—	0.226	0.175	0.195	0.228	0.313
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 150mcg/5ml	—	—	—	0.219	0.257	—
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 250mcg/5ml	—	—	—	0.752	0.705	—
Thyroxine Sod Liq Spec 200mcg/5ml	—	—	—	0.298	—	—

Notes:
1. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed in the community, ie by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England.
2. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of a drug and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income.
3. The quantity of the drug dispensed is measured in units depending on the formulation of the product, for example one tablet or one millilitre.
4. The net ingredient cost per quantity figure is the average over each period and will reflect any price changes in the period.

Barnet Psychiatric Building

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the decision to replace the Barnet psychiatric building with a modern in-patient psychiatric unit will be implemented. [96628]

Mr. Hutton: Barnet Healthcare National Health Service Trust, in conjunction with Barnet Health Authority, is working to identify its preferred option for the future provision of mental health services in the east of the borough. Once this process is complete and the support of local commissioners has been obtained a business case will be submitted to the NHS Executive.

Primary Care Groups

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional funds he plans to give to primary care groups for prescribing. [96649]

Mr. Denham: There are no plans to increase the unified allocations for health authorities for 1999–2000. No decisions have yet been taken about health authority allocations for 2000–01.

Xenotransplantations

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the risks to human health from xenotransplantations; and if he will make a statement. [96644]

Ms Stuart: Xenotransplantation offers a possible solution to the current shortage of organs and tissue for transplantation. The Government, advised by the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority, believes that a cautious, step by step, approach to the exploration of this technology is the right way to proceed. Evidence about the safety of xenotransplantation is kept under constant review by the UKXIRA, which offers advice to the Government on all xenotransplantation issues. Safety remains of paramount importance. Any clinical trial in xenotransplantation involving humans will be allowed to take place only when we are fully satisfied that the risk associated with the particular xenotransplantation procedure involved in the trial is acceptable.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the risks of taking oral corticosteroids for osteoporosis; and if he will make a statement. [96660]

Ms Stuart: It is known that prolonged use of corticosteroids is an important risk factor in the development of osteoporosis.

The Royal College of Physicians' evidence based "Clinical guidelines for prevention and treatment of osteoporosis" highlight this fact, as does the quick reference primary care guide issued by the Department. These documents recommend preventive strategies to help doctors with patients who present with this, and a range of other known risk factors.

In addition the National Osteoporosis Society have also published guidance on "The prevention and management of corticosteroid induced osteoporosis". This is also a useful resource for doctors and members of the public alike.

Continence Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was for each category of continence product purchased by the NHS National Suppliers Trust in the year from February 1998 to January 1999 *(a)* the number of items purchased, *(b)* the total costs and *(c)* the percentage change in the number purchased from the previous year; and what estimate he has made of the proportion this represents of the total of such products, by category or overall, that are purchased by the NHS. [96078]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Information from the National Health Service Supplies Authority is shown in the table. The information relates only to those products that the NHS obtains from NHS Supplies. It is estimated that NHS Supplies' sales represent around 50 per cent. of the total market, with about 30 per cent. of products being provided direct from a supplier to a patient's home and about 20 per cent. direct from supplier to an NHS trust.

Description	*Total Quantity 1998–99 (Thousand)*	*Sales 1998–99 (£000)*	*Total Quantity 1997–98 (Thousand)*	*Sales 1997–98 (£000)*
Disposable nappies	11,909	1,638	11,370	1,615
Incontinence pad, all in one	20,119	7,160	20,691	7,961
Incontinence pad, rectangular	32,816	2,405	40,151	2,835
Incontinence pad, shaped	44,791	9,204	43,636	9,515
Incontinence pad, underpad	33,717	4,181	32,457	3,795
Incontinence pants	5,311	2,303	5,023	2,099
Incontinence pads, reusable	44	241	38	219
Incontinence foam wash	103	362	60	240
Total	148,810	27,494	153,426	28,279

Notes:
NHS Supplies only collect information by the financial year. The last two full years are shown.

All cost information includes Value Added Tax.

NHS Hearing Tests

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting time is for an NHS hearing test in each health authority. [97221]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally.

Territorial Army

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which NHS hospitals employ doctors who are also members of the Territorial Army or reserve forces; and how many such doctors each of these hospitals employ; [97242]

(2) how many NHS doctors are also reservists or members of the Territorial Army. [97243]

Mr. Denham: There are currently 440 doctors in the United Kingdom volunteer reserve medical forces. The further information requested is not available.

NHS Staff

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the results of the most recent NHS hospital and community health services recruitment, retention and vacancy survey, broken down by NHS region. [97270]

Mr. Denham: The detailed results, including an analysis by National Health Service region, of the recruitment, retention and vacancies survey will be published shortly.

Long-term Care

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to conclude his review of long-term care; and if he will make a statement. [97553]

Mr. Hutton: The Royal Commission on Long Term Care was asked to examine the options for funding long-term care, including residential care for elderly people. We are carefully considering the Royal Commission's proposals, the divergences of view within the Royal Commission and the comments that have been made by various organisations and individuals. We will make an announcement in due course.

Midwifery

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the Iceni Team Midwifery Group in Colchester; and if he will make a statement. [97447]

Mr. Denham: We have received a significant amount of correspondence on this subject. The matter was also raised in an Adjournment Debate on Friday 5 November.

There will be no change to existing maternity services in north east Essex unless and until this has been determined by the outcome of a full and open consultation which will be led by North Essex Health Authority.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many team midwifery groups have been disbanded in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating the reasons given in each case; and if he will make a statement. [97452]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of team midwifery groups is not available centrally.

Local Authority Care

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total level of resources he spent in the *(a)* current and *(b)* previous financial year to support 16 and 17-year-olds leaving local authority care. [97304]

Mr. Hutton: Gross expenditure by local authorities in England on all children who have left local authority care was £23 million for 1997–98, the latest year for which information is available.

In addition, certain 16 and 17-year-olds leaving care are, like their peers, eligible for benefits. There are no centrally collected statistics on the benefits paid to 16 and 17-year-old care leavers.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total level of resources he spent in the *(a)* current and *(b)* previous financial year to support 16 and 17-year-olds in local authority care. [97302]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the total level of resources to support 16 and 17-year-olds looked after by local authorities is not held centrally. Statistics for 1997–98, the latest year available, show that gross expenditure of £969 million was spent on all children looked after by local authorities in England. Provisional statistics on the numbers of children looked after by local authorities in England at 31 March show that for all age groups there were 55,300 children of whom 9,000 were 16 years and over.

In addition, certain 16 and 17-year-olds in local authority care (such as lone parents and disabled children) are, like their peers in the community, eligible for benefits. There are no centrally held statistics on the number of 16 and 17-year-olds who fall into these categories.

School Nurses

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reduction there has been in the numbers of school nurses, broken down by health authority, over the last three years. [97443]

Mr. Denham: School nurses employed by National Health Service hospital and community health services have not been identified separately from other community nursing staff within the non-medical censuses conducted by the Department after 1994. Figures for 1995 onwards are not therefore available centrally.

Residential Care

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received regarding the length of the consultation period on the national required standards for residential coma care; and if he will make a statement; [97367]

(2) if he will extend the period of consultation on the national required standards for residential and nursing homes; [97366]

(3) when Hampshire Coma Association can expect a response to its letter to the Minister of State of 6 October. [97360]

Mr. Hutton: I assume that the letter of 6 October referred to is the one from Mr. Ronnie Cairnduff of the Hampshire Care Homes Association. I replied to Mr. Cairnduff on 29 October and I hope that by now he will have received my letter.

On 8 September the Department published the consultation document "Fit for the Future?". About 1,500 copies were distributed to a wide range of representative organisations and individuals for consultation nationally. The document is also immediately accessible on the internet.

To date the Department has received fewer than a dozen letters suggesting that the formal consultation period should be extended.

We currently have no plans to extend the formal consultation period. However, the development of national standards will not be completed overnight and comments received on "Fit for the Future?" within a reasonable length of time after the end of the formal consultation period on 3 December, will be considered.

Medication (Patient Packs)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish guidelines explaining why all medications need now to be in patient packs. [97479]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* There is no legal or National Health Service requirement for medicines to be supplied in patient packs. European Commission Directive 92/27 on medicines labelling and leaflets requires that medicines are supplied to patients with a detailed label and patient information leaflet containing a standard but extensive minimum set of information.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *101*, if he has made a provisional estimate of the aggregate increase in uniform business rates payable by NHS trusts and health authorities in England as a result of the 2000 rating revaluation. [97765]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *101*.

GP Referrals

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken to reduce the time

between patients with non-life threatening conditions being referred by their general practitioners and their appointments with specialist consultants. [97650]

Mr. Denham: On 6 September, following a top level meeting of National Health Service staff and health ministers at Downing Street, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a package of measures to tackle waiting times to see a consultant. These included the extension of the National Booked Admissions Programme, tough new monitoring of outpatient performance and an additional £30 million to improve outpatient services. This money will go direct to the NHS to tackle problem areas locally—providing extra outpatient clinics, employing additional staff and investing in new medical equipment.

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 28 September from Mr. R. Wright, a constituent. [97604]

Ms Stuart: An official at South West Regional Office of the National Health Service Executive replied on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to Mr. Wright on 5 November.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the expenditure per head *(a)* in England, *(b)* in each English health region and *(c)* in each English health authority area on health services estimated for the current financial year and for the previous two financial years. [97967]

Mr. Denham: Information requested for the previous two financial years is shown in the table.

Comparative information on the current financial year is not available.

England—expenditure on health services by head of population (by health authority and region)

£

Health authority/region	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Bradford Health Authority	598.23	627.63
Calderdale and Kirklees Health Authority	545.30	583.02
County Durham Health Authority	586.74	640.61
East Riding Health Authority	570.16	612.79
Gateshead and South Tyneside Health Authority	641.47	678.35
Leeds Health Authority	605.94	633.88
Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority	651.79	730.37
North Cumbria Health Authority	569.98	614.44
North Yorkshire Health Authority	572.92	624.64
Northumberland Health Authority	608.88	645.41
Sunderland Health Authority	605.33	637.05
Tees Health Authority	574.50	625.99
Wakefield Health Authority	663.11	694.98
Northern and Yorkshire Region	594.73	638.12
Barnsley Health Authority	560.91	602.17
Doncaster Health Authority	598.97	634.92
Leicestershire Health Authority	536.87	564.88
Lincolnshire Health Authority	611.59	608.48
North Derbyshire Health Authority	580.60	622.75
North Nottinghamshire Health Authority	544.93	584.65
Nottingham Health Authority	548.03	662.78
Rotherham Health Authority	544.11	591.33
Sheffield Health Authority	631.99	669.82
South Derbyshire Health Authority	561.92	587.99
South Humber Health Authority	618.19	675.48
Trent Region	573.52	615.09
Bedfordshire Health Authority	504.07	550.66
Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Authority	482.86	524.82
East and North Hertfordshire Health Authority	557.18	590.03
East Norfolk Health Authority	561.22	596.32
North Essex Health Authority	540.74	565.85
North West Anglia Health Authority	545.05	582.07
South Essex Health Authority	533.21	560.03
Suffolk Health Authority	532.82	562.89
West Hertfordshire Health Authority	586.98	608.69
Eastern Region	538.79	570.88
Barking and Havering Health Authority	607.33	650.59
Barnet Health Authority	627.40	617.22
Bexley and Greenwich Health Authority	636.82	683.86
Brent and Harrow Health Authority	677.55	714.95
Bromley Health Authority	544.59	575.90
Camden and Islington Health Authority	858.84	979.50
Croydon Health Authority	563.24	609.43
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow Health Authority	704.53	726.37
East London and the City Health Authority	795.67	823.29
Enfield and Haringey Health Authority	608.30	652.10
Hillingdon Health Authority	585.98	630.92
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Health Authority	805.22	830.40
Kingston and Richmond Health Authority	636.15	669.12
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Authority	765.47	815.80
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority	666.34	708.34
Redbridge and Waltham Forest Health Authority	651.97	706.54
London Region	683.37	724.55
Berkshire Health Authority	508.35	547.20
Buckinghamshire Health Authority	502.78	526.56
East Kent Health Authority	591.12	635.55
East Surrey Health Authority	624.55	666.72
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority	607.21	634.07
Isle of Wight Health Authority	685.84	721.72
North and Mid Hampshire Health Authority	508.83	530.86
Northamptonshire Health Authority	507.36	536.23
Oxfordshire Health Authority	492.95	513.54
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority	509.88	572.27
Southampton and South West Hampshire Health Authority	565.01	605.94
West Kent Health Authority	533.19	557.21
West Surrey Health Authority	566.49	585.98
West Sussex Health Authority	578.73	615.59
South East Region	546.31	578.66
Avon Health Authority	564.10	604.19
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority	578.98	610.60
Dorset Health Authority	578.60	618.74
Gloucestershire Health Authority	557.55	574.99
North and East Devon Health Authority	596.29	620.10
Somerset Health Authority	551.10	586.41
South and West Devon Health Authority	584.89	618.85
Wiltshire Health Authority	544.68	572.77
South West Region	568.84	601.22
Birmingham Health Authority	659.02	714.33
Coventry Health Authority	563.24	601.78
Dudley Health Authority	520.91	564.54
Herefordshire Health Authority	586.87	596.42

England—expenditure on health services by head of population (by health authority and region)

£

Health authority/region	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
North Staffordshire Health Authority	576.69	612.59
Sandwell Health Authority	628.16	684.33
Shropshire Health Authority	524.87	552.16
Solihull Health Authority	551.12	582.57
South Staffordshire Health Authority	500.88	526.01
Walsall Health Authority	560.93	627.98
Warwickshire Health Authority	575.46	593.80
Wolverhampton Health Authority	585.88	634.42
Worcestershire Health Authority	563.72	591.96
West Midlands Region	576.18	614.13
Bury and Rochdale Health Authority	598.09	618.56
East Lancashire Health Authority	620.75	663.96
Liverpool Health Authority	686.21	725.60
Manchester Health Authority	733.88	817.36
Morecambe Bay Health Authority	638.94	678.32
North Cheshire Health Authority	577.53	620.55
North West Lancashire Health Authority	615.74	649.68
Salford and Trafford Health Authority	610.84	661.14
Sefton Health Authority	627.36	663.36
South Cheshire Health Authority	554.45	604.89
South Lancashire Health Authority	555.94	606.42
St. Helens and Knowsley Health Authority	603.85	642.18
Stockport Health Authority	544.67	579.77
West Pennine Health Authority	553.72	594.36
Wigan and Bolton Health Authority	560.27	603.36
Wirral Health Authority	592.76	671.84
North West Region	603.95	649.50
England—before adjustment	587.53	625.90
England—after adjustment[1]	654.84	688.21

[1] The majority of drugs expenditure has been accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority rather than individual health authorities. Also the majority of General Dental Service expenditure is not available by health authority. A total national position is shown including these two elements.

Note:

1998–99 expenditure information is provisional

Sources:

Health authority accounts for 1997–98 and 1998–99

Mid-year resident population estimates for 1997 and 1998

Dereford Hospital

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement regarding his plans to investigate waiting list management at Dereford Hospital. [97826]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Plymouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust failed to report 4 over-18-month waiters to the NHS Executive in June. The South West Regional Office of the NHS Executive have investigated how this occurred and, together with the National Patient Access Team, are reviewing Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust's waiting list management systems to ensure there is no recurrence.

Since June 1999 Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust has made changes in management including the appointment of a new clinical director and directorate manager for cardiac services together with the appointment of a new central waiting list manager. The Trust has revised its administrative procedures and is introducing a new patient administration computer system. In addition the Trust is making changes to the way the cardiac service is delivered, including improving staffing levels to increase intensive bed capacity and changes in clinical practice for the timing of pre operative assessments and admissions.

Arachnoiditis

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the services available on the NHS for arachnoiditis sufferers. [97411]

Mr. Hutton: Arachnoiditis sufferers should have access to any service offering investigation, care or treatment, according to individual clinical need. They will have access to local chronic pain relief services which are available in almost all acute hospitals. Additional pain relief may be provided to day case patients either as ordinary admission or to those requiring special facilities such as physiotherapy, psychotherapy or radiology.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total number of people in the United Kingdom suffering from arachnoiditis. [97410]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally. Statistics held by the Department of Health reflect only diagnostic information collected on in-patients attending National Health Service hospitals in England. In 1997 there were 2,200 cases diagnosed with arachnoiditis admitted to hospital in England[1]. The Department cannot determine the prevalence of arachnoiditis from these statistics.

Source:

[1] Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES) system.

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned or evaluated into arachnoiditis; and what plans he has to introduce a compensation scheme for people who developed arachnoiditis following the administration to them of myodil lumbar myelography. [97996]

Mr. Hutton: Neither the Department of Health nor the Medical Research Council have directly commissioned or evaluated research into arachnoiditis.

The Department has no plans to introduce a compensation scheme for people suffering from arachnoiditis.

Depo-medrone and Kenalog

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to health authorities on the use of *(a)* Depo-medrone and *(b)* Kenalog. [97412]

Mr. Hutton: No guidance has been issued to health authorities on the use of Depo-medrone and Kenalog.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had or plans to have with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ensure that planning permissions given to new nursing homes take account of the impact such consents have on local medical services. [97867]

Mr. Hutton: We believe that the supervision of nursing homes is best done through the regulation of homes. General planning legislation is not appropriate for this

purpose as it does not always differentiate residential and nursing homes from other dwellings where their impact on land-use is regarded as broadly similar. Therefore, we have not had, nor do we have any plans to have, discussions with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on this issue.

Currently, nursing homes are regulated by Part II of the Registered Homes Act 1984. Under the Act local health authorities are responsible for registering independent nursing homes. Applicants must provide the health authority with details of the arrangements they intend to make, or have made, for their residents to receive medical services either under National Health Service arrangements or otherwise. In considering the application, the local health authority will take into account the impact on local medical services of registering the home along with all the other considerations.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97421]

Ms Stuart: Expenditure by the Department is:

Year	*Spend £ million*
1995–96	18.504
1996–97	[1]14.518
1997–98	[1]11.848
1998–99	[1]7.181

[1] Includes figures for regional office of the National Health Service Executive, which became part of the Department of Health in April 1996.

In-patient Waiting Lists

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the in-patient waiting list figures announced monthly by his Department include patients on the Booked List who have been given a date for treatment, but have not yet received it. [98008]

Mr. Denham: Yes. Patients who are given a booked date for their treatment are included in the waiting list figures, until they are admitted.

Glyphosate

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies his Department has undertaken into possible effects of glyphosate on human health; and if he will make a statement. [94829]

Ms Quin: I have been asked to reply.

All pesticides used in this country, including glyphosate, must be approved by Ministers. Approval is granted only following thorough scientific evaluation of the risk that the pesticide might pose to people, wildlife and to the wider environment. Only if this evaluation shows that there is no unacceptable risk will approval be granted. All pesticides are subject to routine review and will be reviewed at any time if doubts are raised concerning their safety.

Glyphosate is currently being reviewed by the EU Commission as part of a programme to review all agricultural pesticides currently on the market in the EU. The German authorities were nominated by the Commission to evaluate the data and research studies submitted by companies and prepare a report. This report includes the possible effects of glyphosate on human health. The UK is playing an active part in this work and will ensure that the same rigorous standards are applied in this review as are applied in the UK to pesticide approvals.

Additionally, we have urgently sought the studies allegedly linking glyphosate exposure and an increased risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. These studies have also been passed to the German authorities and will be taken into account in the risk assessment process for the EU review of glyphosate. If we conclude that approved uses involve unacceptable risks, we will not hesitate to act.

Epilepsy

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues aimed at increasing awareness of the recognition and treatment of epilepsy in *(a)* schools and colleges and *(b)* the workplace. [97468]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health have jointly produced "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs", a good practice guide for schools. This includes specific reference to epilepsy, its medication and control. "Wired for Health" (www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk), the website of the Government's Healthy Schools Programme, also provides information on epilepsy through a link to the British Epilepsy Association's website. This is primarily for schools and colleges but has a wider audience including other workplaces.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef Exports

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will send a copy of the latest scientific report approving the safety of British beef to those countries which continue to ban British beef. [97743]

Ms Quin: Ministers and officials will certainly draw the attention of those countries which currently do not accept UK beef imports to the Scientific Steering Committee's clear advice on the safety of UK beef exports. The report is available through the internet.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those members of the Commonwealth which *(a)* have lifted their ban on British beef and *(b)* continue to ban British beef. [97741]

Ms Quin: We have approached a number of third countries, where a potential market has been identified, for their agreement to import British beef under the Date-based Export Scheme. So far, of those third countries that are Members of the Commonwealth, Mauritius and Cyprus have agreed, in principal, that they will allow the import of British beef under the Scheme

while Malta and Singapore have said that, at present, they will continue not to admit British beef. The other countries are still considering their positions. South Africa still has an import ban in place, but has said that this will be kept under review in the light of developments in the EU.

Mr. Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pounds of *(a)* beef and *(b)* beef products have been exported each week to each of the European Union member states since the ban on exporting British beef to those states was lifted. [97055]

Ms Quin: The information requested is not yet available. I will write to my right hon. Friend when it is available. However he may wish to note that Official Overseas Trade Statistics do not separately identify exports of British beef from that of non-UK origin. In respect of exports of British beef, I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 21 October 1999, *Official Report*, columns *570–71*.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries which continue to operate a ban on British beef imports. [96295]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* Among the EU member states only France and Germany still have import bans. We have approached a number of third countries, including the USA, where a potential market has been identified for their agreement to import British beef under the Date-based Export Scheme. To date, four of those countries, Malta, Russia, Singapore and Switzerland, have said that, at present, they will continue not to admit British beef under the Scheme. Most of the other countries are still considering their positions. South Africa has an import ban in place, but has said that this will be kept under review in the light of developments in the EU.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in how many bovine TB triplet study areas badger culling has *(a)* begun and *(b)* been suspended; and how many study areas he expects to commence in 1999. [96067]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Five triplets have been announced so far, two in 1998 and three in 1999. Culling has taken place in two of them. Operations are temporarily suspended in two others. We expect to announce one more before the end of 1999.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the cost per claim was in 1998–99 in each of his Department's regional service centres for each of the Common Agricultural Policy schemes administered by them. [97707]

Ms Quin: The direct cost per claim (in £) of staff administration for 1998–99 at each of the Ministry's Regional Service Centres (RSCs) for each of the major CAP schemes administered by them was as follows.

Regional Service Centre	[1]*AAPS*	[2]*BSPS*	[3]*SCPS*	[4]*SAPS*	[5]*HLCA*	[6]*CSS*	[7]*ESA*
Bristol	83	29	92	60	31	599	154
Cambridge	109	36	101	91	—	718	121
Carlisle	27	33	76	47	26	512	110
Crewe	31	41	112	82	51	296	134
Exeter	31	34	82	66	40	568	109
Northallerton	80	37	86	64	30	408	127
Nottingham	98	41	73	65	34	501	361
Reading	60	39	89	59	—	805	143
Worcester	59	32	92	61	28	610	148

[1] AAPS—Arable Area Payments Scheme
[2] BSPS—Beef Special Premium Scheme
[3] SCPS—Suckler Cow Premium Scheme
[4] SAPS—Sheep Annual Premium Scheme
[5] HLCA—Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances
[6] CSS—Countryside Stewardship Scheme
[7] ESA—Environmentally Sensitive Areas
Note:
Cambridge and Reading offices do not process HLCA claims.

The amount of work involved in processing a claim or agreement varies according to its value and complexity. The claims processed by each Regional Service Centre will reflect the type of farming activity in its area. Where the farm businesses in a region are bigger than the average for the country as a whole, the number of hectares or animals in a claim for a particular scheme will be higher than the average. This will in turn entail longer field inspections and computer checks on more parcels of land. The figures should not therefore be used as a direct comparison of the efficiency of the nine RSCs. MAFF is currently developing efficiency measures for CAP administration by its Regional Organisation for the financial year 2000–01.

Pet Travel Scheme

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the pet travel scheme to be introduced next year will apply to the Channel Islands. [95655]

Ms Quin: There are already no controls on the movement of pet animals between the Channel Islands and Great Britain. We have no plans to introduce any. The Channel Islands have their own quarantine regulations. Whether the Channel Island authorities introduce a pet travel scheme for animals entering the islands direct from abroad is therefore a matter for those authorities.

Nuts

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to restrict the usage of nuts and nut oils in foodstuffs, *(a)* in general and *(b)* in cases where the product is specifically marketed at young children. [96532]

Ms Quin: Young children may exhibit allergies to a range of foods such as milk, eggs, and peanuts (allergies to other nuts are much less common in childhood), but as these are among the foods that provide good nutrition for the majority of children it would be counterproductive to restrict these for children in general. The mainstay of policy on potentially severe allergens such as peanuts and 'tree nuts' (hazel nuts, Brazil nuts, etc.) has been to encourage better awareness of the problem, and in order to safeguard against exposure to foods that may cause reactions.

Nut oils are not normally used in foods for young children and experiments funded by the Ministry have shown that the refined oils that are used in food manufacture are very unlikely to cause a problem even for allergic individuals.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received regarding *(a)* the proposed rise in the hourly charge of the Meat Hygiene Service and *(b)* the need to increase the number of veterinary surgeons employed in slaughterhouses in order to meet EU protocols. [96247]

Ms Quin: My Department has received several hundred representations from Members of Parliament, Members of the European Parliament, industry organisations, individual meat plant operators, farmers, consumers and others about the impact of *(a)* proposals to increase Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) inspection charges, and *(b)* increased veterinary supervision in meat plants in line with EU requirements.

The Government has listened to these concerns about the future of the slaughtering sector. That is why, as my right hon. Friend the Minister announced in September, the Government has further deferred the introduction of charges for MHS supervision of Specified Risk Material controls until at least April 2002. This represents a saving of some £22 million per year to the industry. Moreover, low throughput slaughterhouses will not be required to have full-time supervision by a vet during post-mortem inspection. The MHS is now reviewing its levels of inspections in individual low throughput premises.

We are also carrying out an Efficiency Review of the MHS under an external chairman and in full consultation with the industry. The results will appear early in the New Year. Furthermore, the Government has set up the Meat Industry Red Tape Working Group (the Pooley Group) to advise on how charges and legislation can be adapted to help the industry.

In addition, the Government has sent a copy of the MLC report on meat inspection charges in other Member States to the EU Food Safety Commissioner David Byrne, and urged the Commission to investigate the way in which meat inspection charges are levied in other Member States. In particular, we have urged the Commission to investigate the allegations of subsidy in Italy and non-collection of charges in Spain.

Specified Risk Material

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the consequences that transferring the costs of operating specified risk material controls from public funds to industry will have on the agriculture industry. [96250]

Ms Quin: My Ministerial colleagues and I have received a considerable number of representations on the impact of charges for the specified risk material controls on the agriculture and slaughterhouse industry over the past 12 months.

It was in response to these representations that we decided to defer the introduction of these charges initially for the current financial year and subsequently, as my right hon. Friend the Minister announced on 20 September, until 2002–03 at the earliest.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much funding has been given to farmers in England and Wales to alleviate the added costs of enforcing the controls on specified risk material in each of the past two years; and what funding will be provided in the current financial year. [96246]

Ms Quin: The costs of enforcing the specified risk material controls have been, and will continue to be, borne by the Government during this period. Enforcement of these controls has not therefore given rise to any added costs to farmers.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the costs of enforcing the specified risk material controls in the UK relative to those of equivalent systems in other EU states. [96262]

Ms Quin: The costs of supervising and enforcing the specified risk material (SRM) controls in the UK in the 1998–99 financial year was £17 million.

No-EU-wide SRM controls are in force and individual Member States operate national controls where it is deemed necessary. Such information as is available on the costs in other EU Member States is contained in a report on meat inspection charges and other enforcement costs published in September 1999 by the Meat and Livestock Commission. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

BSE

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many new cases of BSE were reported *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* by other member countries of the EU in (i) 1998 and (ii) 1997. [96679]

Ms Quin: Numbers of confirmed cases of BSE by year of report for the UK are as follows:

	1997	*1998*
United Kingdom	4,335	3,197

We do not have data for other Member States by year of report. The following figures, by date of confirmation, were reported to the Commission by Member States. The information was supplied by the Commission.

Member state	*1997*	*1998*
Belgium	1	6
France	6	18
Germany	[1]2	
Ireland	77	79
Luxembourg	1	
Netherlands	2	2
Portugal	30	104

[1] Germany has reported no homebred cases of BSE.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made towards developing a test for BSE in live animals; and what plans the Government have for implementing such a test. [97227]

Ms Quin: There are, as yet, no validated tests for the diagnosis of either BSE or scrapie in live animals. One test, developed in the USA, appears promising with respect to the diagnosis of scrapie in sheep and chronic wasting disease in elk during the pre-clinical stage of infection and while animals are alive. Scientists at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) are collaborating with their American counterparts to introduce this technology to the VLA where it will be evaluated for use to detect scrapie infected sheep. Although BSE in cattle appears to behave quite differently from scrapie in sheep in terms of tissue distribution, attempts will be made to evaluate the potential for the use of this test for BSE in cattle as well.

We have no knowledge of any other test that has been proven to have the necessary sensitivity and specificity for use on live animals.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many new BSE cases were notified in each month from January to August, broken down by region. [96487]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 29 October 1999]:* The following tables give figures for suspect BSE cases reported in the first eight months of 1999 by region for England and in the first six months of 1999 for Scotland and Wales. It must be noted that BSE has not been confirmed in all of these cases.

Number of suspect cases of BSE reported to MAFF in each region from January to August 1999:

Eastern region

1999	*Number of cases*
January	39
February	27
March	38
April	29
May	20
June	17
July	20
August	25

Eastern Region: Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire and Suffolk

Mid & West region

1999	*Number of cases*
January	62
February	62
March	79
April	58
May	60
June	66
July	61
August	46

Mid & West Region: Cheshire, Derbyshire, Hereford & Worcs, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Manchester, Merseyside, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, West Midlands and Warwickshire

Northern region

1999	*Number of cases*
January	39
February	39
March	52
April	32
May	28
June	33
July	33
August	27

Northern Region: Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Humberside, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Yorkshire North, Yorkshire South and Yorkshire West

South East region

1999	*Number of cases*
January	37
February	33
March	31
April	25
May	26
June	30
July	24
August	19

South East Region: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, London, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Sussex East and Sussex West

South West region

1999	*Number of cases*
January	113
February	108
March	130
April	84
May	120
June	97
July	64
August	76

South West Region: Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Scilly Isles, Somerset and Wiltshire

Scotland

1999	*Number of cases*
January	6
February	10
March	5
April	7
May	6
June	5

Wales

1999	*Number of cases*
January	20
February	28
March	18
April	21
May	19
June	11

From 1 July 1999 provision of figures for Scotland and Wales became the responsibility of the devolved administration of those countries.

Labelling

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to improve the labelling of food products and farm produce. [96682]

Ms Quin: The Government are committed to promoting informed consumer choice. We are pressing for improvements in Labelling rules, at EU level, including full disclosure of major allergens and mandatory, user-friendly nutrition labelling. At a national level we have recently published revised draft guidance notes aimed at ensuring that origin indications on foods are clear and not misleading. In the longer term, we will be seeking changes to labelling rules at European and International level to ensure that information given to consumers about the origin of the foods is clear and unambiguous.

Sheep

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the size of the sheep flock in England and Wales *(a)* at present and *(b)* in each of the last five years. [95748]

Ms Quin: The figures for the sheep breeding flock and for all sheep and lambs in England and Wales are shown in the table for the period from June 1994 to June 1999:

	June 1994	*June 1995*	*June 1996*	*June 1997*	*June 1998*	*June 1999*
Sheep breeding flock [1,2]						
England	9,363,165	9,103,412	8,917,524	9,024,128	9,162,334	9,256,526
Wales	5,597,654	5,500,976	5,490,517	5,433,855	5,667,989	[3]5,480,875
Total sheep and lambs [1]						
England	20,045,276	19,607,285	18,846,873	19,221,664	19,866,376	20,030,615
Wales	11,023,893	11,100,156	10,783,431	10,824,529	11,419,604	[3]10,924,129

[1] The data relate to main holdings only
[2] Up to 1994, the figures relate to ewes kept for breeding, including draft and cast ewes and two-tooth ewes put, or to be put, to the ram. From 1995, the figures relate to ewes and shearlings that have produced lambs in the last year (whether intended for further breeding or slaughter) and female sheep (one year and over) put, or to be put, to the ram.
[3] Figures for Wales for 1999 are provisional.
Source:
June Agricultural and Horticultural Census

Agricultural Wages Board

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to begin consultation on the future of the Agricultural Wages Board; and if he will make a statement. [97381]

Ms Quin: During the passage of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 the Government confirmed its plans to review the Agricultural Wages Board in late 1999. We intend to issue a consultation paper before the end of the year.

Meat and Livestock Commission (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the practicability of setting up a separate meat and livestock commission in Wales answerable to the National Assembly. [97812]

Ms Quin: None; we know that the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) is very conscious of the needs of its Welsh levy payers when drawing up its plans. A Welsh Council of the MLC has now been established in response to Devolution. During the recent quinnquennial review of the MLC there was no pressure from Welsh farmers for a separate MLC type body in Wales.

Milk Marque

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which successor organisation to Milk Marque, farmers in Shrewsbury and Atcham will be able to join on 1 April 2000; and if he will make a statement. [97939]

Ms Quin: That is a matter for Milk Marque. My understanding is that, initially, the allocation of existing members milk contracts in Shrewsbury and Atcham will be dependent on their district code. This means that some members will be assigned to the North and others to the Central successor bodies. After 1 April 2000 they will be able to seek to join any of the successor bodies.

Pigs (Welfare)

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received as a result of his campaign to ensure that public authorities take account of animal welfare when purchasing pork and pork products. [97911]

Ms Quin: A number of local authorities and central purchasing organisations have responded to my right hon. Friend the Minister's letter informing them of the welfare and quality standards of British pig production. Most have

been positive and where appropriate they have been put in contact with the Meat and Livestock Commission to obtain further information.

Organic Milk

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of household milk sold in England in the last year for which figures are available was organic; and if he will make a statement. [97938]

Ms Quin: No figures are available for liquid milk separately, but estimates produced by the organic sector itself indicate that organic dairy products had a retail value of £54 million in 1998–99. This represents around 1 per cent. of total retail sales of dairy products that year.

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for using a single co-operative to market organic milk after 31 March 2000. [97850]

Ms Quin: None. The marketing of milk is a matter for the industry itself. There is already one co-operative marketing organic milk in England.

Heritage Seed Library

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance is being provided by his Department to the Heritage Seed Library at Ryton. [97808]

Ms Quin: This Department supplies no assistance to the Heritage Seed Library at Ryton. However, duplicates of much of the material held by the Heritage Seed Library are held in the Vegetable Gene Bank which is maintained by Horticulture Research International at Wellesbourne and the John Innes Pisum Collection which is maintained by the John Innes Centre for Plant Science Research at Norwich. Both these collections receive assistance from my Department.

Meat Hygiene Appeals Tribunal

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the review of the Meat Hygiene Appeals Tribunal; and if he will make a statement. [97794]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The review is in progress and interested organisations and others have been invited to comment by 29 November 1999. Seven representations have been received so far.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he first received advice from the EU that full-time veterinary inspection in low-throughput slaughterhouses was not necessary. [97541]

Ms Quin: The advice from the Commission on the requirements for veterinary supervision in low throughput slaughterhouses and cutting plants that full-time veterinary ante-mortem inspection in low throughput slaughterhouses was necessary but full-time veterinary post-mortem inspection in low throughput slaughterhouses was not necessary was received on 17 May in a letter dated 5 May 1999.

Sand Eels

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he held on the conservation of sand eels at the October Fisheries Council. [97574]

Mr. Morley: The conservation of sand eels was not on the agenda of the October Fisheries Council. I have had discussions with the Danish Minister and the Commissioner, and expect a Commission proposal addressing the issue shortly.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money was recovered from surveys made through the Integrated Administration and Control System farm inspections in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [97694]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Complete data on the amounts recovered are not available. However, under European Community regulations aggregations are made of the value of all irregularities amounting to euro4000 (£2,844) and above which are detected through IACS field inspections and subsequently recovered. The value of these recoveries in the UK financial years specified by the hon. Member are set out in the following table. It should be noted that recovery procedures for the more recent irregularities are still in their early stages, so the amounts recovered are likely to increase substantially.

£000

	Total value of irregularities recovered
1996–97	308
1997–98	315
1998–99	432

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his officials will rely on Ordnance Survey maps for calculating land area when completing Integrated Administration and Control System forms. [97692]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Under European Community regulations farmers can use field area information taken from Ordnance Survey (OS) maps in their IACS area aid applications. This information is acceptable, provided that the fields concerned are fully utilised for the purpose of the aid scheme under which the claim is made. However, if the field contains an ineligible feature, such as a pond, or a road, or a storage area for straw bales, then the farmer should deduct the area of this feature from the OS area.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the cost of a farm inspection programme under the Integrated Administration and Control System in total per year; and what is the cost per farm inspected. [97693]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The information requested relating to the 1998 inspection programme is currently being compiled. I will write to the hon. Member when it is available.

Egg Labelling

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to improve the descriptions of eggs for sale in terms of the rearing system used. [97501]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* EC Egg Marketing rules cover the use of 'Special Marketing Terms' for eggs for sale in terms of the rearing system used. The European Commission is due to review these terms following the adoption of the Directive on the Welfare of Laying Hens this summer. We await proposals from the Commission. Once negotiations begin we will be seeking to ensure the rules reflect the high welfare standards we have in the UK.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will prohibit the description farm fresh eggs from being used to describe those originating from battery systems. [97502]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Under the EC Egg Marketing Regulations the term 'fresh' is reserved for eggs of Grade A quality, which is the highest standard of freshness and cleanliness laid down. It may be used to describe eggs produced under any system, including battery systems. The word 'farm' is not considered to be misleading, as nearly all eggs are produced on farms of one kind or another.

Florence Agreement (Export Ban)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the legal status of the Florence Agreement in respect of dairy calves of the export ban on live cattle. [98017]

Ms Quin: The Florence Agreement is the conclusion of an informal Council of Minister meeting and, as such, has no legislative status. Nevertheless, the Agreement provides an important framework for the lifting of the export ban on a step by step basis. The lifting of the ban in respect of live cattle is foreseen as one of the stages of the Florence Agreement but it is too early to say when exports of live cattle might resume.

Cattle Ear Tags

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans his Department has to replace the current large MAFF-specified cattle ear tags with more durable, smaller, stronger tags containing a microchip. [97691]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* The specifications for the large distance readable cattle ear tags are laid down in EU legislation and there are no proposals to amend these requirements. We are aware that there is concern over the loss rates of plastic cattle ear tags experienced by some farmers and we are currently investigating the reasons for this.

A European Union funded programme of trials into the various forms of electronic identification for cattle and other livestock is currently underway. After these trials have been completed the European Commission is expected to propose an EU wide standard. In the meantime, farmers can voluntarily use electronic identification but this does not replace the requirement for the large distance readable tag.

Intervention Board

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the Intervention Board performed against its targets for 1998–99. [98368]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Intervention Board's performance against its key targets in 1998–99 was as follows:

	Target	*Performance*
Percentage of claims processed within deadlines	99.0	99.4
Percentage of claims processed correctly	98.5	98.9
Cumulative running cost efficiency gains (percentage)	2.5	5.3
Improvement in index of productivity (percentage)	4.0	5.9
Ratio of disallowance to EAGGF funds handled (percentage)	0.40	0.03
To maintain expenditure within vote provision, cash and running cost limits		Achieved
New value for money savings in procurement of goods and services (percentage)	7.0	9.3
Yield: cost ratio of anti-fraud activities	3.0:1.0	2.9:1.0

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 November 1999

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98204]

Jane Kennedy: In total, The Lord Chancellor's Department uses 40 petrol fuelled vehicles (including four from the Government Car Service) and 594 diesel fuelled vehicles. The Department does not use any liquid petroleum gas vehicles.

We continue to keep abreast of developments in the use of liquid petroleum gas but the availability of this fuel is currently still prohibitive.

Decisions on fuel conversion will be made in light of the best environmental advice available and in accordance with our Green Transport Plan.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98227]

Mr. Lock: My Department's approach to waste management is based on recovery, reduce and re-use as the preferred options for minimising waste sent to landfill. This should help us to achieve the Green Ministers' target for Government Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting, in 2000–01. Our own corporate target is to establish a baseline figure for the amount of waste produced by the end of March 2000. We have no set individual targets for paper, cardboard, glass, metal, plastic or other materials. Our associate bodies have been encouraged to adopt the target I have set as Green Minister.

Criminal Justice (Review)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for a comprehensive review of the Criminal Justice System; and if he will make a statement. [98102]

Jane Kennedy: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is considering the desirability of a major review of the criminal courts and will make an announcement in due course.

General Commissioners of Taxation

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his Department's procedure is for appointing General Commissioners of Taxation; and for what period his committee on appointments of General Commissioners of Taxation has been without a chairman. [98101]

Mr. Lock: The procedure for the appointment of General Commissioners of Income Tax is set out in the Lord Chancellor's Directions for Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. Mr. Hugh Wyatt, the Lord-Lieutenant of West Sussex, became the Chairman of the local Advisory Committee on 1 September 1999 in succession to Mr. Nigel Ventham who retired on that day.

Magistrates Courts (London)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost was of the reorganisation of London's magistrates courts, pursuant to the Access to Justice Act 1999; and how many permanent jobs will be *(a)* lost or *(b)* created within the court service by virtue of the reorganisation. [98139]

Jane Kennedy: The reorganisation of the Magistrates Courts Committees in London is still at an early stage of implementation. It is therefore not possible to provide a costing at this stage. Issues such as redundancy or the creation of new posts will be for the new Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority to determine.

Immigration and Nationality (Legal Aid)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many legal aid franchises for the provision of advice in immigration and nationality cases have been created in the North East Region; and how many cases it is estimated these franchises will take up. [97968]

Mr. Lock: There are currently 26 solicitors' offices within the North East Region covered by the Legal Aid Board's Newcastle and Leeds area offices that either hold a legal aid franchise for immigration or are in the process of obtaining one. These solicitors' offices submitted bills for 1,150 immigration advice and assistance cases in the 12 month period 1 June 1998 to 31 May 1999. Additionally, there is a Not-for-Profit advice agency that holds an immigration franchise in the Leeds area, and is contracted to provide 1,100 hours case work per annum. The proposed contract awards for next year have not yet been agreed, but will be sent to contractors shortly.

Judicial Appointments

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will identify, for each of the last three years, *(a)* the 10 sets of chambers with the highest number of judicial appointments, *(b)* the number of appointments from those chambers broken down by reference to judicial rank and *(c)* the total number of judicial appointments in each year, broken down by judicial rank. [97961]

Mr. Lock: The following details have been obtained about appointments to the Circuit Bench and above. Details of appointments below Circuit Bench level would require extensive searching through individual records and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In 1996–97 there were two appointments from the chambers of Mr. Anthony Boswood QC at Fountain Court, London (one High Court Judge and One Circuit Judge) and two each from the chambers of Mr. Guy Boney QC at 3 Pump Court, London, the chambers of Mr. Keith Armitage QC at 8 King Street, Manchester and the chambers of Mr. James Stewart QC and Mr. Robert Smith QC at Park Court Chambers Leeds (all to the Circuit Bench).

In 1997–98 there were two appointments from the chambers of Mr. David Crigman QC at 1 Fountain Court, Birmingham (one to the High Court and one to the Circuit Bench); and two each from the chambers of Mr. Bruce Blair QC at 1 Mitre Court, London and the chambers of Mr. Stephen Riordan QC at 25–27 Castle Street, Liverpool (all to the Circuit Bench).

In 1998–99 there were two appointments to the Circuit Bench from the chambers of Mr. James Townend QC at 1 King's Bench Walk, London.

No other chambers has had more than one member appointed to the Circuit Bench or above in any one of the last three years.

Details of the number of judicial appointments in the past three years is set out in the following table:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
High Court Judges	8	8	7
Circuit Judges	22	34	15
Recorders	87	37	99
Assistant Recorders	93	120	136
District Judges (including Family Division)	18	38	43
Deputy District Judges (including Family Division)	45	63	100
Stipendiary Magistrates	2	5	7
Acting Stipendiary Magistrates	0	33	66

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the percentage changes made in *(a)* the overall overseas aid package and *(b)* in overseas aid per country in each of the years 1990 to 1997. [96177]

Clare Short: As agreed with my hon. Friend, the information is given in the following table, by region, for the 20 largest recipients of British development assistance and Belize. The largest recipients have been identified according to expenditure in 1997–98, the most recent year for which figures are available.

Annual percentage change in UK gross bilateral public expenditure on aid

% change on previous year

Region	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Total—all countries	–1	15	–3	6	3	–9	5
Africa	–13	20	–13	4	–8	1	6
Sub Saharan Africa	–14	20	–13	6	–8	1	6
America	–26	28	–4	16	46	–44	113
Caribbean	–37	2	5	2	37	₹32	171
Asia	16	5	–3	7	7	–14	–11
Europe	264	39	36	5	–7	5	–18
Pacific	–33	28	–48	–14	–4	–4	–7
Non-Region Specific	–4	7	13	2	–0	3	–7
Top 20 Recipients [1]							
India	35	–15	–12	–2	55	–28	0
Guyana[2]	–62	–48	80	8	80	–52	1,214
Zambia	–31	39	–0	18	5	–31	50
Tanzania	–22	93	–48	–3	–3	81	–4
Uganda	–14	25	17	15	–13	20	6
Ghana	53	–7	–37	–10	11	8	70
Mozambique	–32	90	2	–28	–12	21	68
China	9	64	–4	–16	16	–2	24
Indonesia	37	–5	7	47	11	–33	4
Bangladesh	15	10	–14	2	–5	–17	–14
Montserrat	–29	9	74	2	13	120	165
Russia	n/a	–56	76	58	–6	4	4
Kenya	–23	–2	–16	–3	–4	–10	16
Pakistan	–17	–6	37	73	–28	–1	–49
Malawi	–40	5	–1	53	–13	26	–36
South Africa	15	24	25	8	11	29	17
States of ex-Yugoslavia	n/a	6,403	40	–12	–16	11	–52
Nepal	–13	–17	–3	16	5	–4	11
Philippines	–19	76	9	56	–37	15	–3
Zimbabwe	42	–7	–7	–14	–43	4	–29
Belize	–39	22	39	171	–62	21	–69

[1] The top twenty recipients of UK gross public expenditure on aid in 1997–98 in terms of volume.

[2] In 1997–98 Guyana received £85 million in debt relief.

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list for each year from 1990 to 1997 those countries receiving British overseas aid ranked according to *(a)* benefit per capita of population and *(b)* average income per capita. [96176]

Clare Short: Tables showing this information by region, for the 20 largest recipients of British development assistance and Belize have been placed in the Library. The largest recipients have been identified according to expenditure in 1997–98, the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what countries were beneficiaries of UK overseas aid and by what amounts for each year from 1990 to 1997. [96175]

Clare Short: As agreed with my hon. Friend, the information is given in the following table, by region, for the 20 largest recipients of British development assistance and Belize. The countries have been ranked according to expenditure in 1997–98, the most recent year for which figures are available.

UK gross bilateral public expenditure on aid

£000

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Region								
Total—all countries	1,184,438	1,176,845	1,353,889	1,308,257	1,380,234	1,421,580	1,288,488	1,351,663
Africa	505,941	440,598	526,833	457,991	474,887	437,764	443,596	469,982
Sub Saharan Africa	485,887	419,107	503,001	438,972	464,186	427,785	431,744	457,636
America	125,330	92,905	118,538	114,208	132,350	192,774	107,315	228,081
Caribbean	97,115	61,566	62,598	65,730	67,322	92,154	62,902	170,360
Asia	348,367	403,782	424,574	410,387	438,515	467,595	403,041	357,256
Europe	19,604	71,340	99,362	134,713	141,972	132,158	138,122	113,226
Pacific	33,751	22,462	28,715	14,935	12,806	12,294	11,849	11,058
Non-Region Specific	151,445	145,758	155,868	176,022	179,704	178,996	184,566	172,061
Top 20 Recipients [1]								
India	100,751	135,983	116,108	102,367	100,743	155,882	112,368	112,560
Guyana [2]	21,104	8,031	4,215	7,571	8,168	14,668	7,040	92,488
Zambia	49,868	34,444	47,978	47,752	56,164	58,923	40,594	60,929
Tanzania	41,596	32,430	62,457	32,499	31,584	30,674	55,441	53,229
Uganda	32,211	27,836	34,707	40,551	46,592	40,632	48,827	51,538
Ghana	29,219	44,659	41,736	26,190	23,546	26,252	28,425	48,287
Mozambique	26,593	18,001	34,177	34,744	25,015	22,027	26,611	44,722
China	19,515	21,243	34,914	33,630	28,337	32,803	32,137	39,875
Indonesia	25,158	34,422	32,679	34,885	51,401	57,265	38,477	39,847
Bangladesh	51,600	59,217	64,934	56,068	56,987	54,282	44,937	38,865
Montserrat	4,218	2,996	3,271	5,689	5,815	6,568	14,452	38,317
Russia	8	26,686	11,795	20,749	32,817	30,953	32,205	33,610
Kenya	49,957	38,351	37,514	31,503	30,678	29,379	26,403	30,542
Pakistan	44,824	37,236	35,063	48,197	83,488	60,233	59,367	30,156
Malawi	43,272	26,093	27,378	27,015	41,246	35,721	44,874	28,873
South Africa	8,093	9,325	11,558	14,504	15,667	17,337	22,436	26,264
States of ex-Yugoslavia	6	569	37,003	51,803	45,514	38,095	42,473	20,385
Nepal	19,050	16,513	13,646	13,220	15,377	16,081	15,514	17,252
Philippines	9,086	7,359	12,933	14,045	21,972	13,846	15,885	15,360
Zimbabwe	33,627	47,690	44,268	41,390	35,393	20,172	21,078	15,058
Belize	6,016	3,674	4,498	6,233	16,886	6,335	7,666	2,383

[1] The top twenty recipients of UK Gross Public Expenditure on Aid in 1997–98 in terms of volume
[2] In 1997–98 Guyana received £85 million in debt relief

Ukraine

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what have been the levels of spending of the Know How Fund in each year in the Ukraine; and if she will make a statement. [98001]

Clare Short: Recent expenditure for DFID's bilateral programme for Ukraine (Know How Fund) has been as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	9.814
1997–98	8.873
1998–99[1]	8.744

[1] This figure is provisional, pending publication of Statistics on International Development

In line with our Country Strategy Paper of October 1998, which reflects the White Paper on International Development, DFID bilateral assistance pays particular attention to the social, governance and environmental aspects of the transition.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research the Buildings Research Establishment has carried out on

health costs resulting from fuel poverty and inadequate housing; and if he will place copies of the research in the Library. [93736]

Mr. Meacher: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Road Schemes

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) which road schemes satisfied the initial sift criteria announced on 22 March; [95869]

(2) what the criteria are for undertaking the study in greater depth to determine whether practicable and cost-effective mitigation can be provided for road schemes that meet the initial sift criteria; and what is the timescale for the study. [95870]

Mr. Hill: The criteria for taking forward studies in greater depth of locations where concerns had been expressed about levels of noise are as stated in the answer to my hon. Friend's question on 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *50–51*. The timing of the studies is an operational matter for the Highways Agency and I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jonathan Shaw, dated 11 November 1999:

You recently asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which road schemes satisfied the initial sift criteria announced on 22 March and for clarification of the criteria for undertaking the study in greater depth to determine whether practicable and cost-effective mitigation can be provided for road schemes that meet the initial sift criteria and the timescale for these studies.

The criteria for undertaking detailed studies are as announced to Parliament on 22 March. The majority of studies are expected to be completed by the end of this year. In cases where a road surface has recently been or is about to be replaced in order to meet an operational need, we use a quieter surface wherever possible, which normally provides substantial relief of the problem. In these cases, detailed studies have been deferred for three years in order to better target the available resources.

The attached list shows the locations where previous concerns about noise had been expressed which were found to satisfy the criteria announced on 22 March. Locations where studies have been deferred because of the use of quiet surfacing have been marked with an asterisk.

I trust that this information is helpful, although I must point out that the order of appearance of a location on the list does not in any way indicate its priority nor imply that mitigation measures will be provided in every case following the detailed studies.

Composite list of sites meeting the criteria for further detailed study

A1(M), Doncaster BP Wadworth-Warmsworth
A1, Walshford, North of Wetherby
A12, Boreham
A12, Ingatestone
A14 Exning
A14 Bury St Edmunds
A19, Castle Eden, Durham
A27, Portsbridge, Hants
A3(M) Horndean/A3 Clanfield, Hants
A34, Kingsworthy Link, Hants
A34, Hinkseys/Botley Oxford
A4, Great West Road, Chiswick
A40 Whitchurch Hereford & Worcs
A404(M), Maidenhead, Berks
A404, Marlow Bypass, Berks
A46, Sherbourne, Warwicks
A52, Spondon
M1 Jct 10–11 Luton, Beds
M1 near J25
M1, Jct 33–34, Brinsworth (Rotherham)
M1, Jct 33–34, Tinsley (Rotherham)
M20, Jcts 2–3, Wrotham, Kent
M25 West of Jct 5, Westerham, Kent
M27, Jct 1–2, Copythorne
M27, Jct 3, Nursling
M27, Jct 3–4, Rownhams
M27, Jct 4, Chilworth
M27, Jct 5–7, Swathling/West End
M3, Jct 4–4A, Farnborough Street/Hawley
M42 Jct 1, Lickey End
M50 Bromsberrow Heath, Hereford & Worcs
M6, Jct 26–27, Orrell
M6, Ash Green, Warwicks
M60, Jct 12–13, Worsley
M60, Jct 13–14, Swinton
M602, Jct 1–2, Eccles
M62, Jcts 30–31 Altofts, West Yorkshire
M1 Jct 5–6 Watford, Herts
M3, Jct 5–7 Basingstoke
M56, Jct 11–12, Preston Brook
A1 Wideopen, Tyne & Wear
A1 Long Bennington, Lincs
A14 Exning
A14 Bury St Edmunds
A19, Billingham BP, Cleveland
A3 Ripley, Surrey
A3, Hook Underpass, LB Kingston
A31 Ringwood, Hants
A406, South Woodford (Waterworks-M11)
A52 Clifton, Notts
A627(M), Chadderton
M1 Jct 11–12 Luton
M1 near J28
M25 Clacket Lane, Kent
M25 Godstone, Surrey
M25 Oxsted, Surrey
M3 Camberley, Berks
M3 Winchester
M6 South of Jct42
M6, Jcts 8–9
M6, Jct 34–35 Carnforth
M61, Jct 5–6, Lostock Nr Bolton
M62, Jct 18–19, Heywood
M3 Basingstoke
M3 Dummer, Hants
M4, Jct 5–6 Datchet, Brands Hill
M4, Jct 6–7 Chalvey, Lake End
M4, Jct 7–8/9 Holyport/Bray, Dorney Reach
A1 Tuxford, Lincs*
M6, Jct 18, Holmes Chapel*
A12, Stanway Bypass, Essex*
A14, Huntingdon Bypass, Northants*
A3, Malden Underpass/Malden Way*

A3, Tolworth Underpass/Tolworth Rise*
A46, Kenilworth BP, Warwicks*
M20, Jcts 4–5, Ditton, Kent*
M20, Jcts 10–11, Ashford, Kent*
M5, Upton St. Leonards, Nr Gloucester
M53, Jct 4–5, Wirrall*
M6 Lune Bridge Lancs*
M6, Jct 33–34 Lancaster*.

Water Industry

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that all the environmental benefits he asked the water regulator to ensure were included in the forthcoming price review will happen. [96873]

Mr. Meacher: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to release those parts of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road Concession Agreement with Midland Expressway Ltd. that he is obliged to release; and when he will make available those parts whose release is optional. [96882]

Mr. Hill: A decision will be reached very soon on what is to be released in response to applications for disclosure.

Road Maintenance Condition Survey

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes he anticipates in the defects indices for each category of road when the National Road Maintenance Condition Survey is next published. [97069]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* It would be unwise to make an estimate from a single year. However, in view of the increases in maintenance funding that the Government have provided, I would expect that over the next few years the deteriorating trend in the published indices will start to be reversed.

Road Network (Maintenance)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Highways Agency will achieve a position of steady state maintenance on the bridges and other structures on the motorway and trunk road network in England; and what he expects will be the annual expenditure requirement to maintain that position once it is achieved. [97068]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* The Highways Agency has an ongoing programme of works to ensure all structures are safe and serviceable. The underlying maintenance regime already reflects a steady state position for the Highways Agency's bridges and other structures. In addition, there are programmes of targeted works from time to time to address safety and other issues. Currently there is still a small backlog of maintenance being tackled for rehabilitation of some of the older structures that do not fully meet modern standards.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy on British aerospace companies. [98325]

Mr. Meacher: I will write to my hon. Friend.

MOX Production

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what quantities of plutonium contaminated waste have been created to date in the production of MOX fuel for export at Sellafield; and what arrangements exist for the storage or disposal of plutonium contaminated radioactive wastes from MOX production. [97453]

Mrs. Liddell: I have been asked to reply.

Details of total plutonium contaminated waste arisings at Sellafield to date are provided in the 1998 UK Radioactive Waste Inventory which was published in July 1999. I understand from BNFL that, to date, around 80 200-litre drums of plutonium contaminated material can be attributed to the operation of the MOX Demonstration Facility at Sellafield. It is not possible to identify how much of this total amount is attributable to the production of MOX for export.

I understand that plutonium contaminated material at Sellafield will be compacted, and then encapsulated, prior to storage and ultimate disposal in an intermediate level waste facility. The latter will be subject to a consultation which my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced on 25 October.

Motorways

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the proportion of car owners who use motorways less than once a month; and what proportion never use motorways. [97907]

Mr. Hill: The main source of information on travel patterns of car drivers, and others, is the National Travel Survey which does not identify use by road type. For the general population, the 1997 Road User Satisfaction Study, commissioned by the Highways Agency, showed that 22 per cent. of respondents had not used a motorway in the previous year and a further 34 per cent. had used a motorway less than once a month.

In terms of total car traffic, measured in vehicle miles, around 17 per cent. was on motorways in 1998.

Departmental Asset Sales

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the assets sold by his Department and their value broken down by item, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99 together with an estimate of the value of asset sales planned for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [95809]

Mr. Prescott *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The following table sets out the proceeds for the Department and its agencies. Assets have not been specified item by item as this information could not be provided without

incurring disproportionate cost. The list excludes non-departmental public bodies, Public Corporations and Nationalised Industries. Details of the proceeds received from privatisation and paid into the Consolidated Fund are given separately.

£

	Property retained for construction	*Land and building*	*Plant and equipment*	*Totals*
Sale of assets for Financial Year 1991–92				
DoE/DoT	—	—	—	—
DVLA	—	—	95,762	95,762
Totals	—	—	95,762	95,762
Sale of assets for Financial Year 1993–94				
DoE/DoT	—	—	—	—
DVLA	—	—	5,500,000	5,500,000
Totals	—	—	5,500,000	5,500,000
Sale of assets for Financial Year 1994–95				
DoE/DoT	[1]—	—	—	—
VCA	—	—	—	—
MCA	—	—	—	—
PINS	—	—	—	—
Highways Agency	—	—	—	—
DVLA	—	—	—	—
Totals	—	—	—	—
Sale of assets for Financial Year 1995–96				
DoE/DoT	—	—	1,800	1,800
VCA	—	—	—	—
MCA	—	257,000	62,000	319,000
PINS	—	—	365	365
Highways Agency	—	—	—	—
DVLA	—	—	2,731	2,731
Totals	—	257,000	66,896	323,896
Sale of assets for Financial Year 1996–97				
DoE/DoT	—	—	11,000	11,000
VCA	—	—	—	—
MCA	—	199,000	79,000	278,000
PINS	—	—	16,643	16,643
Highways Agency	—	—	—	—
DVLA	—	—	159	159
Totals	—	199,000	106,802	305,802
Sale of assets for Financial Year 1997–98				
DETR(C)	—	—	2,950	2,950
VCA	—	—	170	170
MCA	—	235,000	494,000	729,000
PINS	—	—	1,533	1,533
Highways Agency	6,017,000	53,731,000	76,000	59,824,000
DVLA	—	—	—	—
Totals	6,017,000	53,966,000	574,653	60,557,653
Sale of assets for Financial Year 1998–99				
DETR(C)	—	—	615	615
VCA	—	—	470	470
MCA	—	67,000	90,000	157,000
PINS	—	—	—	—
Highways Agency	4,131,000	56,038,000	33,000	60,202,000
DVLA	—	—	2,385	2,385
Totals	4,131,000	56,105,000	126,470	60,362,470

[1] No significant sales reported

Forecast Sale of assets for Financial Year 1999–2000

£

	Land and building	*Plant and equipment*	*Investments*	*Totals*
DETR(C)	[1]789,000	—	[2]11,500,000	[3]12,289,000
VCA	—	1,896	—	1,896
MCA	84,000	32,000	—	116,000
PINS	—	—	—	—
Highways Agency	55,000,000	—	—	55,000,000
DVLA	—	—	—	—
Totals	55,873,000	33,896	11,500,000	67,406,896

[1] Plus Seymour House: under negotiation
[2] Refers to sale of Railtrack Group Plc shares
[3] Plus amount under negotiation

Forecast Sale of assets for Financial Year 2000–01

£

	Land and building	*Plant and equipment*	*Totals*
DETR(C)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
VCA	—	400	400
MCA	30,000	20,000	50,000
PINS	—	—	—
Highways Agency	45,000,000	—	45,000,000
DVLA	—	—	—
Totals	45,030,000	20,400	45,050,400

[1] No major sales planned

Proceeds from privatisation paid into the consolidated fund

£

1993–94	
British Rail net proceeds from sales of businesses	[1]10,000,000
1995–96	
British Rail net proceeds from sales of businesses	[1]556,000,000
Sale of PSA Building Management business	11,914,000
1996–97	
British Rail net proceeds from sales of businesses	[1]253,000,000
Gross proceeds from ROSCO sales	1,822,000,000
Gross proceeds from Railtrack sale	1,930,000,000
Sale of PSA Building Management business	27,550,000
Privatisation of Building Research Establishment	1,700,000
1997–98	
British Rail net proceeds from sales of businesses	[1]5,000,000
Sale of PSA Building Management business	2,834,000
Gross proceeds from ROSCO sales (being deferred consideration)	[2]25,000,000
1998–99	
Gross proceeds from ROSCO sales (being deferred consideration)	[2]26,000,000
1999–2000	
Gross proceeds from ROSCO sales (being deferred consideration)	[2]11,000,000

[1] The amounts in respect of British Railways Board were used to reduce the grant paid to BRB by the same amount in those years.
[2] Treated as an Appropriation-In-Aid

GM Crops

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what new distances he will prescribe for the buffer zones surrounding genetically modified crops; if he will give his reasons for the change; when a further review will take place; and if he will make a statement. [96776]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* Recent information from studies about the dispersal of pollen has been referred to ACRE, and it will, if necessary, be taken into account in future advice.

I am aware of the concerns expressed by some, especially organic farmers, regarding the spread of GM pollen. I have consulted other organisations including the Soil Association, and I am considering their responses.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his press release of 5 November concerning GM crops, what commercial benefits the consent holder for GM crops subject to the voluntary agreement will be permitted to seek; if the crops may be given to farmers to feed to animals; what steps he is taking to ensure that such crops do not enter the human food chain; and if he will make a statement. [98108]

Mr. Meacher: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his press release of 5 November, concerning GM crops, if he will list the plantings of farm-scale trials of GM crops subject to the voluntary agreement which he expects to agree between now and 2002, indicating the crops to be planted, when they are to be planted, what acreage is required for each, what separation distances will be used for each and how long after harvest he estimates the environmental effects of each crop will be completely evaluated. [98109]

Mr. Meacher: GM fodder maize and spring and winter oil seed rape, all modified for herbicide tolerance, are the three crops currently in the farm-scale evaluations. Subject to the advice of the independent Scientific Steering Committee, a fourth crop, herbicide tolerant beet (sugar/fodder), may be included in the farm-scale evaluations from next year. Plantings for the farm-scale evaluations are limited to 20–25 fields per crop per year, each field being 5–10 ha in size (approx. 13–25 acres), subject to the advice and requirements of the Scientific Steering Committee. Plantings covered by this agreement will take place during the three years 2000, 2001 and 2002. Separation distances are defined by the terms of the individual consents and the SCIMAC guidelines, and are currently 50 m for oil seed rape and maize, and 200 m for registered organic crops. The Government will ask the Scientific Steering Committee to review data from the farm-scale evaluations and provide recommendations/advice by end-October 2002. For winter oil seed rape, for which the third year harvest will be summer 2003, the Government will ask the Scientific Steering Committee to complete analysis and reporting of results in time for Autumn 2003 plantings to take place should the null hypothesis be confirmed.

London Underground (Safety)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library weekly reports on signals passed at danger on the London Underground. [97085]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Safety is, and must remain, at the heart of London Underground Ltd.'s (LUL) operations. LUL continuously monitors safety performance, including signals passed at danger (SPADs) and reports such incidents to HMRI.

The hon. Member will wish to be aware that all LUL trains have a form of Automatic Train Protection (ATP) which has been in operation for many years. Although SPADs do occur on the Underground, trains are brought to a safe halt because of the ATP system.

I will arrange for LUL to place in the Commons Library a monthly report on SPADs on the Underground.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* deaths and *(b)* injuries attributable to accidents involving drivers using mobile telephones. [97573]

Mr. Hill: There is international research which has found that the distraction may impact on safety. We therefore strongly discourage the use of mobile phones while driving. However, on the basis of current UK data it is not possible to estimate the number of deaths and injuries attributable solely to the use of mobile phones while driving.

Buildings Regulations (Access)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to make Part M of the Building Regulations more accessible to people with a disability. [97368]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Approved Document for Part M of the Building Regulations is published by The Stationary Office. My Department had already drawn their attention to the need to make this publication accessible to people with disabilities. They are endeavouring to obtain the source material in alternative formats to meet the needs of disabled people.

Driving Tests (Waiting Times)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the average waiting time is for *(a)* a driving test and *(b)* a driving retest; what the average waiting times were five years ago; and if he will make a statement. [97700]

Mr. Hill: In measuring waiting times for a driving test, the Driving Standards Agency does not differentiate between those who are presenting themselves for their first test or for a further attempt. Driving tests can now be obtained nationally in around 6 weeks. This compares with an annual national average waiting time of 6.6 weeks for the year 1994–95.

Local Transport Plans

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to announce the allocation for provisional local transport plans for 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [97710]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* We are currently assessing the provisional local transport plans submitted in July. The local transport capital settlement will be announced in December.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 85, concerning major road schemes, if he will estimate the capital cost of each of the schemes listed and provide a total figure. [97709]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Based on the finance forms contained within the provisional local transport plans, the total gross capital cost of the schemes is £812.4 million.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the total amounts of the bids made by local authorities in their provisional local transport plans for the years 2000–01 and 2001–02 for projected local transport capital expenditure on *(a)* maintenance of principal highways, *(b)* maintenance, assessment and strengthening of bridges, *(c)* individual schemes costing more than £5 million and *(d)* individual schemes and groups of related schemes costing less than £5 million; and if he will list the total cash bid for each authority for each year. [97703]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *84*. The total cash bid for each authority for each year may be derived from the information already in the House of Commons Library.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what schemes his Department operates to assist pensioners to install smoke alarms in their homes; and if he will make a statement. [97963]

Mr. Meacher: This Department does not currently operate specific programmes for the installation of smoke alarms. However the New Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) will include the provision of a smoke alarm in the homes of low-income over-60s households where a central heating system is installed. The installations will begin in June 2000 and it is expected that about 55,000 central heating systems will be installed by 2002.

Part I of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 also allows for local authorities to provide grants towards the cost of fire precaution works. Home repair assistance may be available to people who are elderly, disabled, infirm or in receipt of income related benefit for works of up to £2,000.

Since 1992, Building Regulations have required all new dwellings in England and Wales to have a smoke alarm installed. This move, together with the Government's wider publicity and educational efforts, has helped to raise smoke alarm ownership to the current level of 82 per cent. of all households.

First Aid Regulations

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the First Aid at Work Regulations with particular regard to the use and administration of medication for sufferers of *(a)* anaphylaxis, *(b)* diabetes and *(c)* other medical conditions. [97805]

Mr. Meacher: We have no plans to review the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 specifically in respect of the use and administration of medication for sufferers of *(a)* anaphylaxis, *(b)* diabetes and *(c)* other medical conditions.

However, the Health and Safety Executive will shortly be commencing a general review and evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the Regulations.

M18

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the daily volume of traffic on the M18; what is the capacity of the motorway; and what is the projected traffic volume for 2000, 2005 and 2010. [98026]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* As this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency, I have asked the Chief Executive, Mr. Peter Nutt, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Caroline Flint, dated 11 November 1999:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question. You asked "What is the daily volume of traffic on the M18; what is the capacity of the motorway, and what is the projected traffic volume for 2000, 2005 and 2010".

The attached table shows the Daily Traffic Volumes, the Motorway Capacity and the projected traffic volumes for the years 2000, 2005 and 2010.

I trust the information meets your requirements.

M18 Motorway: Daily Traffic Volumes and Motorway Capacity

Link	*J0-J1*	*J1-J2*	*J2-J3*	*J3-J4*	*J4-J5*	*J5-J6*	*J6-J7*
No. of lanes	3	3	2	2	2	3	3
Peak hour capacity (one way)[1,2]	6,900	6,900	4,600	4,600	4,600	6,900	6,900
1998 Daily traffic volume	77,500	66,900	46,500	35,500	38,300	41,500	38,000
Average peak hour flow (one way)	6,588	5,713	4,766	3,209	3,416	3,702	3,382
Demand as percentage of capacity	95	83	104	70	74	54	49
2000 Daily traffic volume[1]	82,162	70,924	49,297	37,635	40,604	43,996	40,286
Average peak hour flow (one way)	6,984	6,057	5,053	3,402	3,622	3,924	3,585
Demand as percentage of capacity	101	88	110	74	79	57	52
2005 Daily traffic volume[1]	94,981	81,990	56,989	43,508	46,939	50,861	46,571
Average peak hour flow (one way)	8,073	7,002	5,841	3,933	4,187	4,537	4,145

M18 Motorway: Daily Traffic Volumes and Motorway Capacity

Link	*J0-J1*	*J1-J2*	*J2-J3*	*J3-J4*	*J4-J5*	*J5-J6*	*J6-J7*
Demand as percentage of capacity	117	101	127	86	91	66	60
2010 Daily traffic volume[3]	108,092	93,308	64,855	49,513	53,418	57,882	53,000
Average peak hour flow (one way)	9,188	7,968	6,648	4,476	4,765	5,163	4,717
Demand as percentage of capacity	133	115	145	97	104	75	68

[1] Peak hour capacity assumes 2,300 vehicles per lane per hour based on the design capacity
[2] The design capacity of the road is based on the bendiness, the gradient and the intended speed of cars with safe gaps between them
[3] Assumes National Road Traffic Forecast 1997 rural motorways growth factors

Environment Agency (Staff Mileage)

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what car mileage was travelled on official business by staff of the Environment Agency in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [98084]

Mr. Mullin: The information is as follows:

(a) 54.37 million miles

(b) 55.00 million miles.

These figures update those in the Environment Agency's annual Environmental Report published in September 1999. The comparable figure for 1998–99 is 52.58 million.

Driving Licences

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of people who regularly take a motor vehicle on the public highway without a valid driving licence. [98039]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* It is not possible to give a precise estimate on the extent of unlicensed driving. In order to get more comprehensive and reliable information on this subject, the DETR has just let a 2½ year contract to study this area and to examine the implications. A recent report from the Automobile Association estimated that there may be around 800,000 people driving without a valid licence.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what format will be used for the new photographic driving licence; what information is stored on this licence; what plans he has to introduce further information onto the driving licence; and if he will make a statement. [98358]

Mr. Hill: Photocard driving licences have been issued by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency since July 1998. The format of the licence is set out in the 2nd EC Directive on driving licences and contains: the driver's photograph, signature, categories of driving entitlement; name, address and date of birth; and the EC flag containing the UK symbol. There are no plans to add any further information to the licence.

Vehicle Documents

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many road vehicles in use in the UK *(a)* do not have an up-to-date road tax disc, *(b)* are not registered in the name of the present keeper of the vehicle and have not been so for more than one month and *(c)* do not have valid insurance. [98038]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* The DETR has recently carried out its latest large scale survey of Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) evasion across the UK for all vehicle tax classes, the results of which will be published early next year. The last major survey in 1994 estimated that around 1.5 million vehicles in Great Britain did not have an up to date tax disc.

We are committed to tackling the problem of VED evasion and have introduced a number of measures to end this, including a national scheme to wheel-clamp and impound unlicensed vehicles seen on a public road.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) holds details of the registered keeper of vehicles within its vehicle record database. At the end of June 1999, there were 327,640 cases out of some 28 million where the DVLA did not have the details of the registered keeper of a licensed vehicle. It is not possible to tell the number of cases for which this has been so for more than one month without running a prohibitively expensive scan of the database.

The DETR does not have information on the number of vehicles which do not have valid insurance.

Cables

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many representations his Department has received from local authorities asking for greater powers to enforce high standards of work when companies are laying cables in residential areas; [98124]

(2) what measures are in place to prevent cable-laying companies causing disruption in residential areas. [98125]

Mr. Hill: The Department has received many letters, from Members of Parliament and others, about cable activities. However, since the last General Election only one representation has been received from a local authority.

In residential areas and elsewhere, cable-laying in the street is subject to the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. Undertakers must give advance notice of works and co-operate with the local highway authority. Failure to do so can attract penalties. There is a duty to avoid unnecessary delay or obstruction of the street, and the street authority can direct the timing of street works in order to avoid or reduce traffic disruption, and restrict street works activity for a period of twelve months following the completion of highway works.

On 13 October the Government went out to consultation to honour the commitment in last year's Integrated Transport White Paper to consult on options for an incentive system, with penalties, to minimise

disruption to road users, and to encourage improved co-ordination of street works. Copies of the consultation document were placed in the Library of the House.

Polegate Bypass

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what is the total amount of compensation paid following the cancellation of the Polegate bypass project; [98068]

(2) when work on the Polegate bypass will begin. [98064]

Mr. Hill: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Peter Nutt to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Nigel Waterson, dated 11 November 1999:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Keith Hill, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the Polegate Bypass.

Tenders for this scheme were invited on 10th November. This should allow us to award the contract next spring, ahead of the previously announced programme.

The overall levels of compensation are close to being finalised with those who submitted tenders for the cancelled Weald and Downland DBFO Project, which included the Polegate Bypass scheme among others. Interim on-account payments totalling £5m (including VAT) have been made. The Polegate Bypass scheme is in the Government's Targeted Plan of Improvements.

Driving (Drugs)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussion he has held with the Anti-drugs Co-ordinator on the dangers of taking *(a)* illicit and *(b)* prescription drugs and driving. [98117]

Mr. Hill: Ministers and officials in the Department meet their opposite numbers in other Government Departments, including the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit, to discuss a range of topics. Those include the policy and research work to deal with those who drive whilst impaired through drugs. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary who is responsible for road safety matters will be meeting the Co-ordinator in December.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment she has made of the report, "Ecstasy Use in Northern Ireland: a Qualitative Study", with particular reference to its conclusions on drugs and driving. [98118]

Mr. Hill: The Department has noted the conclusions of the Report. We have our own research programme into the effects of drugs on driving and are considering further research. We will also consider how best to publicise the risks of driving whilst under the influence of drugs, both medicinal and illegal.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98207]

Ms Beverley Hughes: My Department does not keep a central record of vehicles used and their fuel type. Property managers are asked to take account of environmental performance when hiring or buying vehicles.

The Department has prepared guidance for Government Departments on choosing greener vehicles, which is now available on the Department's website, along with other advice, including DETR's guide to New Car Fuel Consumption and Emission figures.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98223]

Ms Beverley Hughes: My Department's approach to waste management is based on the three "R"s: with "Recovery" (i.e. recycling, composting and energy recovery) following "Reduce" and "Re-use" as the preferred options for reducing waste sent to landfill. This should help us to achieve the Green Ministers' target for Government Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting, in 2000–01; and our own corporate target which is to increase the amount recovered and recycled by 10 per cent. each year to achieve 70 per cent. recovery or recycling in 2003–04. The Department has not set individual targets for paper, cardboard, glass, metal, plastic and other materials although work is underway on setting a target for paper.

Cytotoxic Drugs

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the letter of 3 November from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Whitty, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, reference P/W/28454/99, concerning cytotoxic drugs, when he expects the report on NHS ward staff handling such drugs to be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published. [98146]

Mr. Meacher: The research referred to, entitled "Occupational Exposure of Health Workers to Cytotoxic Drugs: A Ward-Based Study", has been completed. A draft of the report is currently being considered within the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The final report should be submitted to Health and Safety Commission's Health Services Advisory Committee before the end of the year. I will ensure that a copy is then placed in the Library of the House. HSE is also discussing with the co-author how the report should best be published.

Duneland Habitats

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to letter AM/15632/99 of 15 June from his Department to the hon.

Member for Linlithgow, what was the result of the September meeting of the member states of the Atlantic Biogeographical Region on sand dunes; and what action has been taken to protect duneland habitats. [98280]

Mr. Mullin: The UK's series of 340 candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) was considered with those of seven other member states at a scientific seminar in Kilkee on 6–8 September 1999. The meeting indicated that a number of habitat features, including four sand dune types, were insufficiently represented in the UK and other member state's SAC series. Duneland habitats are already afforded protection through their status as designated nationally or internationally important sites (SSSIs, candidate SACs, Ramsar sites and Special Protection Areas etc.). Furthermore, as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, a priority habitat action plan for coastal sand dunes was published on 25 October.

Sensitive Species

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the letter of 3 November from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, reference CM/20311/99, if he will make a statement on progress at the Conference of the Parties at the Bonn Convention in respect of sensitive species, with particular reference to dolphins, turtles and albatross. [98145]

Mr. Mullin: The proceedings of the sixth Conference of the Parties to the Bonn Convention began on Wednesday and will continue until Tuesday of next week. It is too early at present to say how these discussions are going.

Eurocontrol

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is the Government's policy to support the European Union's application to joint Eurocontrol; and if he will make a statement. [98153]

Mr. Mullin: The Government support Community membership of Eurocontrol because it is the most appropriate way for the Community to exercise its competence and express its views with regard to air traffic management in Europe.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of a formal relationship between the European Union and Eurocontrol on sovereignty over UK air space. [98155]

Mr. Mullin: Negotiations are under way for Community membership of Eurocontrol. The terms of the Accession Protocol have not yet been agreed, but there will be no direct impact on UK's sovereignty over its airspace.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to give decisions of Eurocontrol direct applicability and direct effect in the United Kingdom. [98154]

Mr. Mullin: Eurocontrol is currently undertaking a legal assessment of the feasibility of its decisions being directly applicable within member states. The UK is participating in this work and the Government will consider carefully the results of this study.

M4 Bus Lane

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans his Department has to extend the use of the M4 bus lane to include high-occupancy vehicles; and what measures he plans to implement to ensure compliance with this rule; [98184]

(2) how many *(a)* buses, *(b)* taxis and *(c)* bus services use the M4 bus lane; and what were the equivalent figures for the same stretch of road prior to the bus lanes existence; [98185]

(3) what assessment he has made of the effect of the M4 bus lane on traffic flow and journey times on the M4 *(a)* between the M25 intersection and the start of the bus lane and *(b)* before the M25 intersection at (i) rush hour and (ii) off-peak periods; and if he will publish the recent report submitted by the Road Transport Laboratory; [98182]

(4) what plans he has to introduce variable speed limits on the M4 between the M25 intersection and the Chiswick terminus; [98183]

(5) what estimates he has made of *(a)* the number of passengers carried in the M4 bus lane and *(b)* the number of people who have changed their journey routes to avoid the M4 since the bus lane was established. [98186]

Mr. Hill: As this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency, I have asked the Chief Executive, Mr. Peter Nutt, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Bernard Jenkin, dated 11 November 1999:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Keith Hill, has asked me to answer your recent Parliamentary Questions about the M4 Bus Lane and the recent report compiled by the Road Transport Laboratory. I have been asked to reply as this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency.

Independent monitoring of the M4 Bus Lane pilot scheme by the Transport Research Laboratory is provided in regular detailed reports. I am arranging for a copy of the report on the first three months of operation to be placed in the Library of the House and I enclose a copy for your personal use. In addition, a summary of the findings during this initial period has been published in a leaflet that has been distributed widely. A copy of this leaflet has been placed in the Library of the House.

The full report shows the effect on the journey time between junction 4 and the start of the elevated section to be:

Minutes

Time of day (weekday)	*Average time saved per vehicle*	
	Buses and taxis	*Other vehicles*
06.30–09.30	4.5	2.6
09.30–17.30	−0.8	−0.7
17.30–20.30	3.2	1.6
20.30–06.30	−1.5	−1.3

The monitoring during months four and five show similar results. Information is not available for the length of the M4 to the west of junction 4.

Use of the bus lane varies from day to day and week to week. The highest measured flows were in the week commencing 18 October when Paddington Station was closed and averaged approximately 5000 vehicles per day. Measured peak hour flows were 60 buses and coaches, 10 minibuses and 370 taxis. The previous highest flow during a week was 4,300 vehicles per day. During the week commencing 25 October (the half term week for many schools) the average daily flow was approximately 4,000 vehicles, of which 500 were buses or coaches, 90 were minibuses and 3,400 were taxis. In this week the typical peak hour flow included 35 buses or coaches, 8 minibuses and 220 taxis.

Comprehensive traffic count data by vehicle type is not available for the period prior to the bus lane. Estimates based on sample counts before the bus lane was installed indicate hourly flows at peak times of up to 50 buses, coaches and minibuses and up to 350 taxis.

Surveys carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory show that the average occupancy of buses and coaches to be 15, taxis to be 2.5 and other vehicles to be 1.2, all including the driver.

The surveys have found no evidence that drivers have changed their journey routes to avoid the M4 since the bus lane was opened. The surveys have revealed that the observed maximum traffic flows on the elevated section of the M4 has increased by 10 per cent. since the opening of the Bus Lane.

We are continuing to evaluate this pilot project but there are no plans at present to introduce variable speed limits or allow high-occupancy vehicles to use the bus lane.

Drivers' Blood Alcohol Level

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is the Government's policy to lower the permitted blood alcohol level for driving; and if he will make a statement. [98149]

Mr. Hill: We have consulted on a package of measures to combat drinking and driving, including the possibility of lowering the permitted blood alcohol level to 50mg per 100ml. An announcement will be made as part of the forthcoming publication of our road safety strategy.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what provision has been made to protect against loss to public funds as a result of *(a)* failure and *(b)* overrun of (i) time and (ii) cost for the new computer system for the Vehicle Inspectorate; [98244]

(2) if the Government will require guarantees that the new computer system for the Vehicle Inspectorate will work before awarding a contract. [98243]

Mr. Prescott: The Vehicle Inspectorate is confident from the negotiations which have taken place over the last 18 months that the contract for the computerised MOT service is robust and deliverable. The contract contains a number of safeguards building on the experience gained from other major projects. The project was awarded "significant" status in March 1998 by HM Treasury and there has been input throughout the procurement process from the Treasury Private Finance Initiative Taskforce. An independent review of the contract will be undertaken during the preferred bidding stage to provide a further level of assurance. The Vehicle Inspectorate will ensure that, should the service be unavailable for any reason on the expected service commencement date, MOT testing will be able to continue.

M4 Accident

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the causes of the fatal accident and fire on the M4 in Berkshire on 1 November; [98347]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to *(a)* public funds, *(b)* private individuals and *(c)* the private sector arising from delays resulting from the accident which closed the M4 in Berkshire on 1 November. [98348]

Mr. Hill: We would not like to make an assessment prejudging the Coroners verdict and this would, in any case, be a matter for the police.

The information needed to make a reasonable estimate of the costs arising from the accident is not available.

HGVs (Safety)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend the law to improve the safety of supplementary fuel tanks on heavy goods vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [98371]

Mr. Hill: All fuel tanks, including supplementary ones, fitted to motor vehicles must comply with the requirements of the Road Vehicles (Construction & Use) Regulations 1986. These specify that fuel tanks must be constructed and maintained so as to be reasonably secure from damage and so that the leakage of liquid or vapour is adequately prevented. There are currently no plans to amend these regulations but any future changes would be best made through amendments to the European Directive on fuel tanks.

Private Hire Vehicles

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to allow the Countryside Agency to make grants from the Rural Transport Development Fund to enable private hire vehicles to comply with the legislation relating to disability discrimination; and if he will make a statement. [98363]

Mr. Hill: Private hire vehicles are not required to comply with any of the relevant provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Rural Transport Development Fund makes grants in respect of a wide range of transport projects including contributions towards the cost of adaptation of vehicles or purchase of accessible vehicles in rural areas. Applications are considered on their merits.

Rail Subsidies

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the proportion which Government subsidies to *(a)* train operating companies and *(b)* Railtrack in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997, (iii) 1998 and (iv) the current year formed or will form of those companies' profits. [98331]

Mr. Hill: Government subsidies are paid, not to Railtrack, but to train operating companies (TOCs) in the form of Support for Passenger Rail Services (SPRS) paid

by the Franchising Director and grants paid by Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs). Those subsidies are not hypothecated to cover particular types of expenditure, so they cannot be directly identified as the source of payments made by TOCs to Railtrack.

The table provides details, for 1996–97, 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, of SPRS and PTE payments to TOCs, of access charges paid by TOCs to Railtrack, and of Railtrack's profits. Details of TOC profits for those years are not readily available.

Passenger grants paid to TOCs, etc.

£ million cash prices

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000 (plans)*
SPRS payments	1,809	1,429	1,196	1,073
PTE payments	290	375	337	326
Total Government subsidies to TOCs	2,099	1,804	1,533	1,399
Passenger access charges	2,119	[1]2,131	2,169	—
Railtrack operating profit before tax	339	[2]380	471	—

[1] Restated as 2,149 in Railtrack's Annual Report and Accounts 1998–99
[2] Restated as 398 in Railtrack's Annual Report and Accounts 1998–99

National Air Traffic Services

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many respondents to his consultation paper, "A Public-Private Partnership for National Air Traffic Services Ltd.", requested confidentiality for their comments; and what were the names of those individuals or organisations whose response to the document was in confidence. [98170]

Mr. Prescott: In accordance with Exemption 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, I am unable to provide the names of those persons and organisations who requested confidentiality, as these details were given and received in confidence.

Rat Infestations

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to include questions in the 2001 English House Condition Survey on rat infestations associated with dwellings; and who will be responsible for processing and analysing the data. [98380]

Mr. Mullin: As with the 1996 survey, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have requested that a module of questions on rat and mice infestation is included in the 2001 EHCS. Assuming the module is included, this Department will manage the processing of the module as part of the data processing of the whole data set and MAFF will then be responsible for analysing the rodent data.

Local Government Funding

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he or any of his Ministers last met representatives of Hammersmith and Fulham borough council to discuss central Government funding and the standard spending assessment for that council; and who was present at that meeting. [98289]

Ms Beverley Hughes: There have been no recent meetings arranged to discuss the funding of Hammersmith and Fulham borough council involving Ministers and representatives from that authority.

Cyclists

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to raise awareness amongst cyclists of the need to obey the Highway Code; and if he will make a statement. [98344]

Mr. Hill: The Department and local authorities actively work to ensure that cyclists are aware of the need to obey the Highway Code.

The Code itself was re-issued in February. It applies equally to all road users. For the first time, it brings together the rules applying to vulnerable road users, including cyclists, in specific sections at the beginning of the Code. This made the Code easier to read and assimilate.

The Driving Standards Agency promotes the Highway Code and seeks opportunities for specific road users to be targeted. The Agency has recently published the "Road Code", which is aimed at young road-users and builds on the Highway Code. Its message includes a section on cycling. The Department is also involved in other initiatives which support the principles of the Code. For example, on 22 October we issued a "Cycle Smart" comic and poster using Disney's "Recess" gang characters to promote the rules of cycling.

Local Authority Road Safety Officers make use of the cycle training for both children and adults to stress the need for cyclists to obey the Highway Code. About a third of children receive this training and this ensures that they grow up to be careful and considerate road users of all modes of transport. Every child who undertakes cycle training receives a copy of the "Highway Code for Young Road Users".

Ellington Colliery

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures of *(a)* regional and *(b)* regeneration assistance he proposes to deal with the anticipated job losses from the closure of Ellington Colliery, Northumberland. [98387]

Ms Armstrong: I will write to the right hon. Member.

Radon

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance there is on the protection of new dwellings from radon; and if he will make a statement. [98390]

Ms Beverley Hughes: BRE have today published a revised version of BR 211 "Radon: Guidance on Protective Measures for New Dwellings", which updates previously published guidance, details measures that must be incorporated in new buildings and defines the geographical areas where radon protection is necessary. The Approved Document to Part C of the Building Regulations 1991 refers to the BRE document as a source of advice on where radon protection may be needed and what new measures are appropriate.

In addition to Cornwall and Devon and parts of Somerset, Northamptonshire and Derbyshire—which were covered in previous guidance—the new guidance identifies new areas where radon protection will be needed. These are parts of the Yorkshire Dales; parts of Wales and the Welsh Border; South Oxfordshire; parts of the Midlands adjacent to the currently delineated areas in Derbyshire; Northamptonshire; parts of Gloucestershire, the Lake District and Northumberland. There are also a few scattered areas in south-east England where these measures need to be applied.

As well as the maps based on NRPB data, BR 211 contains a second set of maps based on the assessment of geological radon potential which has been prepared by the British Geological Survey. These maps show grid squares that are underlain, completely or in part, by geological units that potentially exceed the action level for either basic or full protection. The guidance explains how the two sets of maps should be used to determine the level of protection needed.

Copies of BR 211 have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Taxi Fares (Millennium)

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has reached a decision on what fares London taxi drivers can charge over the Millennium celebrations. [98402]

Mr. Hill: I intend to take forward a statutory instrument so that from 8.00 pm on 31 December 1999 until 6.00 am on 1 January 2000 London taxi fares, including any extra charges to the standard tariff, should be double the total amount shown on the meter, up to a total metered fare of £25. For total metered fares of over £25, there should be added a flat rate supplement of £25 to the total metered fare. The normal supplement of £3 for New Year's Eve will not apply. Details of all these arrangements must be displayed in the vehicle.

In reaching this decision I have taken account of representations from the London taxi trade, and the interests of the travelling public, both in having taxis available to them, and in having fares which are not unreasonable on this unique occasion. I believe these rates represent a sensible balance between making it worthwhile for drivers to work that night and protecting consumers from exorbitant charges.

Aviation Policy

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish *(a)* the consultation paper and *(b)* the White Paper on aviation policy. [98408]

Mr. Hill: I will write to the hon. Member.

National Forest Company

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will report on the National Forest Company's progress in creating the National Forest in the East Midlands. [98411]

Mr. Mullin: I have arranged for copies of the National Forest Company's Annual Report and its Accounts for 1998–99 to be placed in the House Libraries.

Maritime Traffic

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many incidents there were involving breaches of the Channel traffic separation scheme and collision prevention regulations in each year from 1988 to the present; and what were the names and flags of the ships involved; [98415]

(2) how many prosecutions have been brought in respect of infringements of the Channel traffic separation scheme or collision prevention regulations in each year from 1988 to the present; and what were the names and flags of the ships involved; [98416]

(3) how many collisions there were in the Channel in each year from 1988 to the present; and what were the names and flags of the ships involved; [98417]

(4) what percentage of foreign-flagged ships visiting the UK were inspected in UK ports under port state control arrangements in each year from 1988 to the present; what was the ratio of inspections to detentions in each of these years; and what was the percentage of inspected ships found with deficiencies in each of these years. [98418]

Mr. Hill: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Pollution Charges

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) on what dates integrated pollution prevention and control charges will come into effect in each of the other EU member states; [98431]

(2) what assessment he has made of the level of integrated pollution prevention and control charges levied in other EU member states. [98432]

Mr. Hill: I will write to the hon. Member.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the President of the Council what means she has used to target small shopkeepers from the Asian community to ensure they are Year 2000 compliant. [97278]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

All small companies, in whatever sector or community, have been a target for Action 2000's "Act now!" Campaign, which has included a multimedia campaign offering an Action Pack of Helpsheets obtainable by contacting a free Action Line and website. Poster campaigns in July of 1998 and through 1999 were directed at all business communities. A "Last Chance Guide" was mailed to all UK businesses with 1–249 staff in September 1999 and a London regional campaign provided opportunities for Asian businesses to exchange experiences with others.

Specific initiatives which focused more directly on the Asian community have included the London business channel review in July 1998 which established contact with Asian Business Initiative, Asian Business Network and the Brick Lane Business Association. Paid advertising has been placed in Asian media and, since 1998, an on-going dialogue has been established with an Asian publishing group offering interviews and free articles by the Action 2000 Press Office about the need to achieve Year 2000 compliancy.

Portcullis House

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will provide details of specification and cost for *(a)* carpets per square metre, *(b)* office furniture by type of item, *(c)* stone and brick by type used and *(d)* lighting for Portcullis House. [96725]

Sir Sydney Chapman *[holding answer 3 November 1999]:* Of necessity the specifications used in the contracts for the Portcullis House project are lengthy, detailed documents. In summary, therefore, the information requested is as follows (with all the figures exclusive of VAT).

Carpet

Specification

Fusion bonded cut pile carpet in 600mm x 600mm tiles with a single dot pattern on a contrasting background. Enhanced quality carpet for level 1 to achieve a weighted sound improvement index of 28dB.

Cost per square metre for the supply and laying—£23 per square metre and £30 per square metre.

Office furniture

Specification

Desks and tables—suited oak office furniture comprising 230 desks with cable management facilities, 140 meeting tables, 140 low tables, 920 under desk pedestals, 75 three draw filing cabinets and 75 four drawer filing cabinets.

Office chairs—210 high back, upholstered, wide seated executive chairs with arms, seat and back height adjustment, lumbar support with forward and back tilt mechanism. 300 medium or low back, fabric upholstered operators' chairs on castors without arms with seat height adjustment and synchronised seat and back adjustment. 890 medium back, fabric upholstered visitors'/ meeting table chairs without arms.

Easy chairs—250 fully upholstered, fairly firm but comfortable armchairs in fabric upholstery on glides.

Leather seating—design, supply and installation, including all fixings, for leather squabs and backs for the window seats.

Worktops and shelving—design, supply and installation of shelving and worktops with solid English oak edge lippings overlaid in English oak veneer. The shelving system is to be designed for ease of adjustment by the users. Support brackets are to be finished in a polyester powder coating.

Estimated contract values

Desks and tables—£685,000

Office chairs—£440,000

Easy chairs—£110,000

Leather seating—£205,000

Worktops and shelving—£380,000

(Each of these contracts also includes the provision of furniture in areas other than offices).

Stone

Specification

Courtyard paving—carboniferous limestone in slab sizes of between 600mm x 600mm and 780mm x 780mm and various other sizes on a cementitious screed base. Stone faced planters, seats, pool and water feature.

External paving—the detailed design, fabrication, supply and installation of a natural stone paving to terrace, arcade and general pavement/road areas, laid either in a traditional manner or with lightweight void filler over asphalt waterproofing.

Sandstone columns—supply only sandstone blocks of various dimensions cut, dressed and worked to accommodate reinforcing mechanism. Colour range pink to red, predominantly light red. Crushing strength 40N/per square metre (tested to ASTM C170–87). Modulus of rupture 6.9N/per square metre (tested to ASTM C99/87).

Granite plinths and walling—supply granite blocks dressed and worked to accommodate stressing mechanisms. Block sizes approximately 1300mm x 1400mm x 900mm and 290mm x 1000mm. Colour range—pink to red predominantly. Crushing strength 140N/per square metre (tested to ASTM C170–87). Modulus of rupture 10N/per square metre (tested to ASTM C99/87).

Estimated contract values

Courtyard paving—£560,000

External works—£1 million

Sandstone columns—£3.6 million

Granite plinths and walling—£580,000

(The sandstone contract was on a supply only basis, as was most of the work in the granite contract, the scope of which was reduced for technical reasons after the contract was awarded. The contract for the external works also covers the gates and railings).

Brick is not being used on the project.

Lighting—there are various types of light fittings which form part of a much larger package for the provision of design and installation of electrical services within the building.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what is the estimated cost per square metre of office space for Portcullis House. [96724]

Sir Sydney Chapman *[holding answer 3 November 1999]:* As an extension to the facilities provided in the Palace of Westminster, Portcullis House provides much more than office space. Of the six main floors, four are to be used for offices with the actual office space taking up less than a third of the total floor area. Based on the current forecast, the estimated capital cost of the building, including the office space, is £6,200 per square metre (excluding VAT).

Public Bills

Mr. Austin: To ask the President of the Council (1) if she will make a statement on her plans for extending to public bills the procedure whereby private or hybrid bills may be carried over to the next session of Parliament; [98434]

(2) if she will make a statement on the constitutional implications of carrying over public bills from one session of Parliament to another; [98435]

(3) what assessment she has made of the advantages and disadvantages of carrying over public bills from one session of Parliament to another; and if she will make a statement. [98436]

Mrs. Beckett: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

House of Lords Bill

Mr. Fisher: To ask the President of the Council if she will make a statement about the implementation of paragraph (5) of the new clause in Lords Amendment No. 1 to the House of Lords Bill; and if she will specify the standing order referred to in that clause. [98423]

Mrs. Beckett: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

DEFENCE

Bilderberg Conference

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if his Office has retained copies of *(a)* the agenda and *(b)* other documentation resulting from the Turnberry Bilderberg meeting; [94142]

(2) if he will make a statement on his contribution to the Bilderberg Conference at Turnberry. [94137]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Oral Statements

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the reports published by his Department and its associated bodies, *(b)* the reports received from bodies set up by his Department, *(c)* the decisions his Department has taken and *(d)* events in the UK and elsewhere, since 27 July, which satisfied the criteria he uses for deciding whether to apply to make oral statements to the House when the House is sitting. [93973]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the quality of the training provided to recruits from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers at the School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Borden; and if he will make a statement. [95673]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of training of recruits at the School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Borden *(a)* how many recruits are waiting for their courses to start and *(b)* how many have had their training suspended prior to completion and at what cost to his Department. [95674]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Staff

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff employed by his Department in mobile grades who do not have limited mobility are currently on *(a)* gardening leave and *(b)* special paid leave; and for what periods of time. [96883]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Performance Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all performance targets set for his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies since May 1997, other than those listed in Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 [Cm 4181], stating in each case *(a)* the target to be reached and *(b)* the date by which it was to be reached. [94981]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* My Department has set out the key performance targets on which it will be judged in its Public Service Agreement (PSA), and the measures of success it will use in the Output and Performance Analyses (OPA) published in March this year. These high-level targets are set out in an internal classified Departmental Plan and are cascaded through the Department down a hierarchy of subordinate Plans for each Service and for each subordinate budgetary unit; these lower level plans include additional and more detailed targets to supplement and amplify PSA targets. Listing these operational targets would be inappropriate and disproportionate in terms of resources.

A list of targets and target dates for Agencies up to March 1999 can be found in the Next Steps Report. Since March this year, key targets for individual Defence Agencies for 1999–2000 have been announced to Parliament. I shall write to the hon. Member with the details.

Performance targets and objectives have been set, or are in the process of being set, for those executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies for which my Department is responsible. Where targets have already been agreed, they are published in the respective Body's plans.

Army Retention Study

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of the Adjutant General's Army Retention Study being undertaken by the Hay Management Group. [96835]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Multi-role Armoured Vehicle

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the multi-role armoured vehicle to enter service; and if he will make a statement. [97107]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

UK's Nuclear Forces

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received calling for the United Kingdom's nuclear forces no longer to be in a state of continuous alert; and if he will make a statement. [97129]

Mr. Hoon: We have received a number of representations from organisations and members of the public about our nuclear deterrent, including its alert status. The Strategic Defence Review (SDR) announced that submarines on patrol are at a reduced day-to-day alert state reflecting improved strategic conditions. We maintain only one submarine on patrol at a time, its missiles are not targeted and are at several days "notice to fire". We also considered other more radical de-alerting measures in the SDR, such as taking submarines off deterrent patrol and removing warheads from their missiles and storing them separately ashore. We concluded that neither, in current circumstances, is compatible with maintaining a credible minimum deterrent with a submarine-based nuclear system.

Armed Forces (Pay)

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce a common pay scale for the armed forces. [97354]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Landing Platform Docks

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the current figure is for slippage in respect of the landing platform docks; what the expected date of delivery is for each vessel, taking into account present slippage; what the expected date of delivery is, taking into account recovery of slippage; and if he will make a statement. [97753]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nancekuke Defence Establishment

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of work carried out at his Department's establishment at Nancekuke in Cornwall on the health of the local population. [97645]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The establishment at Nancekuke, now RAF Portreath, was known as the Process and Research Division of the Chemical Experimental Establishment, Porton Down, from 1951 until it was closed in 1980 and the site returned to the RAF.

The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency is now aware of any assessment of the health of the local population. However, a report in 1970 by the Registrar General showed that, up to 1969, the mortality of persons who had been employed at Nancekuke was rather less than the average for England and Wales as a whole, possibly due to regional differences in climate and social conditions.

BVRAAM

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received binding assurances that all relevant technologies and source codes would be transferred to the United Kingdom if it acquired a United States BVRAAM. [97711]

Mr. Hoon: Assurances concerning the necessary transfer of relevant technologies and source code are the subject of discussions with Raytheon Systems Limited and the United States Department of Defense. Should the UK choose a US solution to its BVRAAM competition, the conclusion of these discussions would be incorporated in a contract with Raytheon and in a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Department of Defense.

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the approximate weight of ordnance dropped on Iraq by allied planes in 1999; and if he will make a statement. [97634]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the right hon. and learned Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Porton Down

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down has ever been a secret germ warfare base. [97610]

Mr. Kilfoyle: An experimental establishment was first set up at Porton Down in 1916 in direct response to the use of chemical warfare in World War I against the allied forces. At that time, the remit was for both defensive and retaliatory capabilities. Since the late 1950s, the work has been entirely concerned with the defence of the UK and our Armed Forces against the threat posed by both chemical and biological warfare agents.

Though the past 83 years have seen many organisation changes at the site, Porton Down remains home to the UK's centre of expertise in chemical and biological defence matters and is now the Chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

Whilst there have been, and still are, aspects of the work which are necessarily classified in the interests of national security, CBD and its predecessor establishments have always sought to encourage their scientists to publish the results of their work in open literature and to inform interested parties, including the media, about their work through activities such as open days, visits and conferences.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received opposing the work of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency's Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton

Down from *(a)* members of the public, *(b)* non-Governmental organisations, *(c)* charities and pressure groups and *(d)* hon. Members since May 1997; if he will make it his policy to close the establishment; and when he will visit CBD Porton Down to meet the scientific and industrial staff. [97642]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Since May 1997, there have been no representations opposing overall the work of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency's (DERA) Chemical and Biological Defence Sector at Porton Down (CBD). Letters from members of the public, Members of Parliament and other organisations have focused only on specific programmes and on some areas of work at CBD's predecessor establishments.

As made clear by the previous Secretary of State in the Ministry of Defence paper 'Defending Against the Threat from Biological and Chemical Weapons' announced on 21 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns *534–35*, CBD Porton Down will continue to play a vital part in the Government's response to the proliferation of these weapons.

My noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement hopes to be able to visit CBD in the near future, as part of a programme of visits to DERA sites.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions on which *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* officials and *(c)* agency staff have (i) corresponded with, (ii) met and (iii) spoken to Mr. Rob Evans about the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down. [97644]

Mr. Spellar: Since May 1997, staff at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency have responded to some 15 written requests from Mr. Rob Evans for lists of titles, copies of technical papers and other information about work at the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector (CBD) of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) or its predecessor establishments.

Mr. Evans has spoken to DERA Press Office staff on several occasions during 1998 and once this year to date. I am advised that he may have attended a DERA exhibition in Dorset in September 1997 and may have visited the Porton site as part of a group visit.

Mr. Evans has also written on a number of occasions to officials in other branches of the MOD about matters that are linked to CBD Porton Down.

I am not aware of any direct contact between Mr. Evans and MOD Ministers in the period of this Government.

Trigat Missiles

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what safeguards he has put in place to ensure that the medium range Trigat missiles will be completed before the Milan 1 ATGW systems expire. [97876]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Bright Star 99

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK troops took part in the Bright Star 99 exercise; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [97879]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Hospital Haslar

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many orthopaedic surgeons are in post at Royal Hospital Haslar; what is the waiting time for an appointment for *(a)* a local civilian and *(b)* a serving member of HM forces; and how many (i) service men and (ii) civilians are on (1) the waiting list and (2) the pending list. [97853]

Mr. Spellar: Royal Hospital Haslar has six orthopaedic surgeons in post, of whom four are service men and two are civilian locums.

There is not a separate waiting list for civilian patients and for patients of HM forces. Equally, both may be seen by service or NHS consultants. Waiting times for first routine orthopaedic outpatient appointments are five weeks for the Fracture Clinic and seven to ten months for the General Clinic. The number of service personnel on the waiting list for their initial outpatient attendance is 271. The number on the pending list is 351. The number of civilians on the waiting list for their initial outpatient attendance is 143. The number on the pending list is 287. A system is in place, based on operational readiness state, that enables service personnel to receive their first outpatient appointment more quickly.

Warminster Training Centre

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many *(a)* servicemen and women and *(b)* civilians are (i) resident or (ii) visiting for work at the Warminster Training Centre; and how many physicians and other trained medical staff provide (1) 24-hour cover and (2) working day cover; [97856]

(2) how many *(a)* physiotherapists and *(b)* osteopaths are (i) resident at or (ii) visitors to the Warminster Training Centre; and if he will make a statement about medical support at Warminster Training Centre. [97852]

Mr. Spellar: 1,644 Servicemen and women and 944 civilians are employed at the Warminster Training Centre, none of whom is resident within the perimeter. In addition, up to 1,000 servicemen and women may be visiting, or on course at, the Training Centre at any time, some of whom may be accommodated in any of the two Officers' Messes, the Warrant Officers' Mess, the Sergeants' Mess or the Corporals' Mess.

Medical support to Warminster Training Centre consists of a Primary Care Practice, which is a designated Army Training Practice and provides the following service:

Working day and 24 hour medical cover by:—

a Senior Medical Officer (Lt Col) and a Regimental Medical Officer (Captain);

two civilian locums who between them provide nine nights per month cover and three sessions (1.5 days) in total each week.

A Community Psychiatric Nurse who visits for two sessions (one day) in total each week;

a non-residential physiotherapist contracted for 11 hours each week who, with effect from 29 November, will be replaced by a full time military physiotherapist;

six Regimental Medical Assistants and three Combat Medical Technicians of the 1st Battalion The Devon and Dorset Regiment; and

a full time Health Visitor from Wiltshire Health Authority.

There are no osteopaths employed at, or visiting, the Centre.

In addition, a Dental Centre adjoins the Practice and consists of one civilian Practitioner, two civilian auxiliaries and one military Dental Nurse. All provide working day and 24 hour cover. Secondary medical care is provided by the Defence Secondary Care Agency and by the National Health Service Hospitals at Bath, Salisbury and Warminster.

Departmental Research

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the titles of research studies, audits and surveys *(a)* being undertaken and *(b)* commissioned by his Department for completion within (i) 1999 and (ii) 2000, indicating in each case when the results are due to be published. [98015]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

IT Projects

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the information technology projects being undertaken by his Department and agencies responsible to his Department including the *(a)* start date, *(b)* planned completion date, *(c)* expected completion date, *(d)* planned cost and *(e)* estimated cost; and if he will make a statement. [98014]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Reports

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the titles of official departmental reports being prepared for publication in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000, indicating in each case the planned date for publication. [98016]

Mr. Spellar: Under current plans, the following are the official departmental reports being prepared by the Ministry of Defence for publication in 1999 and 2000, and their planned dates for publication:

The Defence White Paper 1999 (December 1999)

Ministry of Defence Performance Report 1998–99 (December 1999)

The Government's Expenditure Plans 2000–01 to 2001–02: Ministry of Defence (spring 2000)

The Defence White Paper 2000 (during 2000)

The Annual Report of Defence Activity 1999–2000 (July 2000)

Ministry of Defence Performance Report 1999–2000 (autumn 2000)

Ministry of Defence Departmental Investment Strategy 2001–02 to 2003–04 (autumn 2000).

RAF Locking

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the efficiency savings made as a result of the closure of RAF Locking and the transfer of personnel to RAF Cosford. [98123]

Mr. Spellar: Efficiencies arising from the transfer of RAF training activities from RAF Locking to RAF Cosford are in the region of £6 million annually. These are derived largely from reduced manpower and operating costs.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military personnel were made redundant following the closure of RAF Locking. [98122]

Mr. Spellar: There have been 35 civilian redundancies as a result of the transfer of RAF training activities from RAF Locking to RAF Cosford. Alternative employment is being sought for a further four civilians. No military staff redundancies are involved.

Cadets

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those schools in the United Kingdom which run *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Royal Air Force cadet training centres, indicating which are comprehensive schools. [98189]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Colchester Garrison

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department held with English Heritage in respect of proposed developments and disposals of buildings at Colchester Garrison. [98161]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98221]

Mr. Kilfoyle: MOD is implementing a corporate Environmental Management System (EMS) based on ISO 14001 principles which will develop policies and set objectives to reduce the environmental impact of the activities of the Department and its agencies. An integral part of the EMS will be a waste management system to measure baselines for waste streams to enable recycling targets to be set. The framework of the corporate EMS will be produced by March 2000, and the EMS will be implemented by March 2001. Current MOD guidance on recycling is detailed in JSP 418, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

North Oxfordshire Consortium

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Cherwell District Council will receive a reply to the letter sent to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State earlier this year concerning the joint venture agreement between his Department and the North Oxfordshire Consortium. [98044]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have replied today.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98209]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Emergencies

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings he has had with health authority managers regarding the use of NHS personnel in a military emergency; and if he will make a statement. [98316]

Mr. Spellar: I recently met with my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lord Hunt, and the Director of the NHS Executive South East Region. Our discussions covered a range of issues of common interest. Officials in my Department and at the Department of Health are working closely together on the implications for the NHS of deploying substantial numbers of medical Reservists on military operations and possible requirements for the NHS to treat significant numbers of casualties returned to the UK in the event of a major overseas conflict. Current Defence planning does not include the call up of civilians other than members of the Volunteer Reserves Forces or former Regular personnel with a Reserve liability.

Territorial Army

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the medical services of the Territorial Army. [98314]

Mr. Spellar: The Territorial Army (TA) medical services provide excellent medical care. The Strategic Defence Review (SDR) placed increased importance on the use of medical reserves and recommended an additional 2,000 personnel for the TA medical services. Currently, they have a manning shortfall of some 40 per cent. against the post-SDR requirement. Urgent measures are being taken to address this shortfall, including a major recruiting campaign which was launched on 23 September 1999.

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reorganise the career structure of the Territorial Army Medical Service. [98315]

Mr. Spellar: We have no plans to reorganize the career structure of the Army Medical Services Territorial Army (AMS TA) although its expansion, as a result of the Strategic Defence Review, will provide increased career opportunities. The Terms and Conditions of Service of the AMS TA are constantly monitored with a view to making appropriate and reasonable changes in support of recruitment and retention.

Remembrance Day

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the involvement of the Gurkhas in the Remembrance Day commemorations. [98328]

Mr. Spellar: As in every year since 1920, the Armed Forces will take part in the annual cenotaph ceremony on Remembrance Day. Each Service will be represented by their Chiefs of Staff and troops currently on ceremonial duties. This year the Army presence will include one officer and two soldiers from the Gurkhas currently serving in this country.

Kosovo

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks and other minorities have been abducted in Kosovo since the K-FOR occupation; and how many have been rescued. [96102]

Mr. Vaz: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* churches and *(b)* other historic buildings have been destroyed since the K-FOR occupation of Kosovo. [96103]

Mr. Vaz: I have been asked to reply.

We do not have confirmed figures of damage or destruction of churches and other historical buildings. Unconfirmed reports suggest that up to 40 may have been destroyed.

K-FOR now, if possible, guard patrimonial sites around the clock. 285 soldiers are on permanent guard at 35 Serbian churches or patrimonial sites. We recognise the importance of these sites to the Serb community and hope that the steps taken by K-FOR, and the improving deployment of an international police service, will stop further damage.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many murders have been committed against each of the minorities in Kosovo since the K-FOR occupation; [96100]

(2) how many Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks and other minorities have left Kosovo since the K-FOR occupation, [96099]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer of 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 679, concerning night patrols by the Irish Guards in Kosovo, when the hon. Member for Linlithgow will receive the letter promised. [98137]

Mr. Hoon: Following the announcement by my predecessor on 19 July 1999, *Official Report*, column 783, the Irish Guards battle group withdrew from Kosovo in

October. However, while they were in Kosovo, the Irish Guards were not the only unit to undertake night patrols. Night patrolling is a routine operation for KFOR troops.

Procurement

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 681, on heavy lift aircraft, if he has re-opened the competition for interim strategic lift capability which was terminated by the Minister for Defence Procurement on 4 August. [98330]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Bowman Project

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to complete his review of the in-service date of the Bowman project. [98046]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Strategic Airlift Programme

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter from the Chief of Defence Procurement of 23 August to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood about the short-term strategic airlift programme. [98389]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The text of the letter follows. In addition, the hon. Member may wish to refer to the answer given on 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *404*, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) which elaborates on the answer given in the Chief of Defence Procurement's letter of 23 August.

Letter from Sir Robert Walmsley to Mr. John Wilkinson, dated 23 August 1999:

I am writing in response to your letter of 28 July to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Short Term Strategic Airlift programme. The matter falls to me for answer within my responsibility as the Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

You will no doubt be aware of the announcement made by Minister of State for Defence Procurement, that following a review of the tenders the Department concluded that none of the bids offered an acceptable solution at an affordable price. I attach a copy of the press release.

My team is now exploring with industry other options that may satisfy our urgent need for additional airlift in the short-term. We will be reviewing a range of possibilities, including more assured spot charter of Antonov 124.

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* studies and *(b)* tests he proposes to commission concerning the effects on Gulf War veterans of depleted uranium weapons a[illegible]nour. [98354]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Petroleum

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *664*, concerning petrol prices and petrol taxation in member countries of the European Union, if he will update those figures. [98107]

Mrs. Liddell: The latest figures for unleaded petrol prices are for mid-September 1999. The information requested is as follows:

	Average price (pence per litre)		
	Total	*Of which: taxes*	*% of tax*
United Kingdom	73.0	58.1	79.5
Austria	54.6	35.8	65.7
Belgium	60.3	43.2	71.7
Denmark	63.6	45.5	71.6
Finland	68.4	48.5	70.9
France	63.9	49.0	76.7
Germany	60.1	42.7	70.9
Greece	43.6	26.3	60.3
Ireland	50.5	33.2	65.8
Italy	64.3	45.7	71.1
Luxembourg	47.1	29.1	61.8
Netherlands	66.9	47.9	71.6
Portugal	51.9	33.9	65.4
Spain	47.6	30.6	64.2
Sweden	65.3	46.2	70.9

Comparisons between these figures and those for December 1998, published in the answer of 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *664*, are affected by exchange rate movements over the period.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints were received from petrol retailers by the Director General of Fair Trading in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* the first six months of 1999 concerning their contracts with petroleum suppliers; and what action was taken in response to such complaints. [98178]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading.

The Office of Fair Trading has advised that they received approximately 57 complaints from 40 retailers concerning their contracts with petroleum suppliers in 1998, and approximately 15 complaints from 11 retailers in the first six months of 1999. No formal action was taken as a result of the complaints, as the Office of Fair Trading did not consider that any of the complaints raised competition issues.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the terms of reference are for the Director General of Fair Trading's review of petrol undertakings; when the review will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [98233]

Dr. Howells: The Director General of Fair Trading has a duty under section 2 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 to keep under review the carrying on of commercial activities in the United Kingdom.

Pursuant to these duties, he is reviewing the informal undertakings given in 1966 by petrol wholesalers to establish whether there is a case for removing, altering or retaining the remaining undertakings.

The timing of this review is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance he has given to the oil industry concerning the disposal of any stocks of leaded petrol that may remain on 31 December. [98177]

Mr. Hill: I have been asked to reply.

No specific guidance has been given, as the disposal of leaded petrol stocks by 31 December 1999 is a matter for oil companies to manage under existing controls. Stocks have, however, already been depleted substantially by the changeover to lead replacement petrol (LRP), encouraged by the lower duty rate of LRP relative to leaded petrol that came into effect from 1 October 1999. An ongoing amount of leaded petrol, up to a limit of 0.5 per cent. of total annual petrol sales, may also to be sold after 31 December 1999 under the terms of directive 98/70/EC. Regulations specifying the conditions under which this derogation will apply—and which implement the directive requirements generally—will be laid very shortly.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports he has received in 1999 of smuggled petroleum products being offered to petrol filling stations. [98179]

Mr. Byers: My Office has received representations from a number of oil companies and trade associations in 1999 concerning the smuggling of petroleum products into Northern Ireland. Information given as a result of these representations has been passed to the Northern Ireland Office and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many petrol filling stations in the UK closed in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* the first six months of 1999. [98180]

Mr. Byers: In 1998, 1,066 petrol filling stations closed in the UK. Figures for the first six months of 1999, are not yet available.

Internal Market Council

Mrs. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the outcome of the Internal Market Council held in Luxembourg on 28 October. [98398]

Mrs. Liddell: I represented the UK at the Internal Market Council in Luxembourg on 28 October.

The Council held an open debate on the integration of sustainable development and the single market and approved a report to be presented to the Helsinki Council in December. It adopted a resolution on standardisation, laying down a set of principles for future work on standards, and on mutual recognition, setting out the direction of future work to make mutual recognition of rules, qualifications and standards more effective. The Council reached a Common Position by qualified majority on the chocolate directive, with Belgium and the Netherlands voting against and Luxembourg abstaining. There was no decision on the proposed Directive on Artists' Resale Rights, with a blocking minority of the UK, Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Denmark opposed to the proposal. The Presidency, in response to calls from other member states, will continue its efforts to find a compromise solution.

Over lunch, the Council discussed the Commission's consultative communication on a New Strategy for the Single Market which sets out four strategic objectives. There was general support for the draft strategy and agreement that it should be closely linked to the Cardiff economic reform process. There was also a brief discussion of Council rationalisation, with some member states expressing particular interest in combining the Internal Market and Industry Councils.

The Presidency reported that with regard to the Takeovers Directive the UK and Spain were continuing their discussions of the issue of communications between Gibraltar competent authorities and counterparts in other member states, and it hoped that agreement could be reached by the December IMC.

The Commission reported briefly on SLIM (Simpler Legislation in the Internal Market), the Business Test Panel and BEST (Business Environment Simplification Taskforce) and said that it would present its evaluation of SLIM at the 7 December IMC. The UK introduced a joint paper which we had agreed with the Netherlands, Denmark, and Austria on resolving weaknesses in the SLIM system.

The Council took note of a Green Paper launching a review of the Product Liability Directive and a progress report on negotiations on the directives on preserved milk and sugar.

Departmental Property Leases

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department will publish statistical information indicating the percentage reduction negotiated by his departmental officials for commercial property as against the original rent demanded by landlords. [98309]

Mr. Byers: While my Department has had success in achieving reductions to landlords' original demands, publishing such detail would prejudice the future negotiating position both of my Department and other public bodies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements exist to ensure that representatives of his Department, when negotiating leases on commercial property for use by his Department secure the best possible terms. [98306]

Mr. Byers: Since April 1996 when my Department assumed direct responsibility for the management of its estate, we have always used professional property and legal advisers to ensure we secure best value leases that meet the Department's operating needs.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will investigate occasions when his Department has failed to negotiate lower rents for commercial property where lower rents are available for similar property used by quangos and private sector operators. [98310]

Mr. Byers: Yes, if such occasions are drawn to my attention.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will investigate the effect of increases in commercial rents paid by his Department on similar properties the tenants of which are quangos or private sector organisations. [98308]

Mr. Byers: When conducting rent reviews on our properties, my Department consults the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate (PACE) with the aim of ensuring that our negotiations will not have an adverse effect on other Government Departments and public bodies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what monitoring arrangements exist to ensure that rents paid by his Department for office accommodation in the regions are comparable to those paid by the private sector and quangos. [98307]

Mr. Byers: Since April 1996 when my Department assumed direct responsibility for the management of its estate throughout the United Kingdom, my Department has always taken advice from the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate (PACE) and its own commercial property advisers on rent reviews and new lets to ensure that our costs reflect local market conditions.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98230]

Mr. Byers: My Department and its agencies already have targets in the majority of offices for recycling paper, cardboard and toner cartridges.

We continue to explore other potential areas for recycling.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of his Department are deployed in the United Kingdom's mission to the WTO in Geneva; and what are (i) the personnel costs and (ii) the office costs of maintaining them. [98235]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with developing countries about the forthcoming WTO Seattle Round. [98236]

Mr. Byers: DTI Ministers and officials frequently meet representatives of developing countries and set out the UK's support for the launch at Seattle of a comprehensive new Round of trade negotiations, including a clear development agenda responding to the needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed. This week the Minister for Trade is speaking about the new Round to a business and government audience at the Commonwealth Business Forum in Johannesburg.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people will be in the UK's official delegation to the forthcoming Seattle Ministerial Meeting of the WTO; how many of those will be *(a)* Government officials, *(b)* Ministers and *(c)* others; and what the estimated cost is of the UK's participation in the meeting. [98238]

Mr. Byers: The exact composition of the UK Delegation has yet to be determined. I will write to my hon. Friend with the answer shortly.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98202]

Mr. Byers: The total number of vehicles used my Department and its Agencies fuelled by petrol, diesel and liquid petroleum gas are 86, 134 and 0 (zero) respectively. As liquid petroleum gas becomes more generally available, my Department and its Agencies will consider their positions on the utilisation of liquid petroleum gas as a fuel.

Inward Investment

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much inward investment has taken place in the *(a)* Middleton and *(b)* Heywood areas since 1 May 1997. [98254]

Mr. Byers: According to the records of the North West Development Agency there have been 5 overseas companies that have invested in the areas since 1 May 1997 as follows:

Rika International of Japan—located in Chadderton

Voith Sulzer Paper Technology of Germany—located in Middleton

P & M Vacuum Services Ltd of the USA—located in Heywood

Digital Projection International of Canada—located in Rochdale.

There is one further USA company located in Middleton which has requested anonymity.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the volume of inward investment in the Doncaster area for each of the last five years; and how many companies have made such investments. [98028]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* The figures in the table are taken from information given by companies to the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber or the Regional Development Agency at the time of the announcement of a decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the best estimate of jobs created/safeguarded by an investment in its initial three years. There is no requirement on companies to notify their decision to invest and therefore these figures are not comprehensive nor do they take account of subsequent developments.

Doncaster Travel to work area

Year	Number of project	Number of new jobs	Number of safeguarded jobs
1994–95	6	86	158
1995–96	5	102	730
1996–97	1	120	–
1997–98	4	50	260
1998–99	3	8	922

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 5 November 1999, *Official Report*, columns *336–37*, for what reasons £8 million is being transferred from the Reserve to the Post Office for Horizon re-negotiation costs; and what the reason is for the re-negotiation. [98136]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The payment of £8 million reimbursed the Post Office for additional costs incurred in the negotiations with ICL earlier this year. This was to cover the ongoing costs of the contractor while further work on the merits of the various options was carried out.

EU Structural Funds

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the amounts of money received under European Union programmes *(a)* within the Doncaster Borough and *(b)* within Dearne Valley for each year since 1979 to the most recent available date. [98025]

Mr. Byers: It is not possible to provide information on European Regional Development Fund projects approved before 1990 as this information is not available at District level.

The table shows the ERDF approved each year in Doncaster, Dearne Valley and the South Yorkshire sub-region.

Year	Doncaster	Dearne Valley	Sub Regional
1990	0	0	0
1991	10,397,521	1,062,191	0
1992	2,344,488	2,957,824	1,270,389
1993	10,433,021	8,539,721	493,457
1995	5,615,664	3,868,484	710,821
1996	5,895,210	10,442,316	3,628,936
1997	17,500	815,614	723,999
1998	1,118,982	4,105,532	11,987,140
1999	3,544,027	5,159,080	5,477,372
Total	39,366,413	36,950,762	24,292,114

The Objective 2 Programme for ERDF funding was not signed until February 1994 and consequently there was no spend in that year.

It is not possible to provide information on European Social Fund projects from 1990–97 as this information is not available at district level. Records prior to 1989 are held at the EC in Brussels.

European Social Fund (ESF) figures are as follows for 1998–99:

The Doncaster area received £11.42 million in ESF grants.

Dearne Valley received £8.856 million in ESF grants.

National Minimum Wage

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many calls have been received by the Minimum Wage Hotline *(a)* nationally and *(b)* from the Yorkshire and the Humberside Region since it was opened. [98024]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* Since the introduction of the national minimum wage on 1 April 1999, the National Minimum Wage Helpline has dealt with some 90,000 calls. There are no figures for individual regions, as most enquiries are dealt with over the telephone without the need to take such details.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employers have been found to be in contravention of national minimum wage legislation since its inception. [98037]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* Since the introduction of the national minimum wage on 1 April 1999, National Minimum Wage Compliance Officers have received some 3,200 complaints concerning workers being paid less than the minimum wage. Following investigations, officers found that, in around 50 per cent. of the cases, employers were not complying with the legislation. Action is taken in every case where underpayment is detected.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much his Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97420]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* The value of contracts let centrally to external consultants and advisers for 1997–98 was £0.94 million and for 1998–99 was £0.64 million.

For information on contracts let centrally in 1995–96 and 1996–97, I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 19 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *816*.

The above information does not include contracts let by the Department's Executive Agencies, and I have asked the respective Chief Executives to reply separately to this question.

Letter from Julian Thompson to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 November 1999:

I am replying to your Parliamentary question tabled 3 November 1999 regarding expenditure on external consultants and advisors in each of the last four financial years.

Patent Office expenditure is:

Financial year	Expenditure £
1995–96	138,000
1996–97	124,000
1997–98	39,000
1998–99	8,000

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 November 1999:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about external consultants by The Insolvency Service.

The Insolvency Service Executive Agency of the Department of Trade and Industry has spent the following amounts on external consultants and advisors in the last four financial years:

Year	*£000*
1995–96	502
1996–97	12
1997–98	Nil
1998–99	5

Letter from T. L. Lonsdale to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 November 1999:

I have been asked to reply to your recently tabled Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on external consultants and advisors. The information you require for Companies House is as follows:

Expenditure on external consultants/advisors

Year	*£000*
1995–96	130
1996–97	1,000
1997–98	1,300
1998–99	2,600

The major component in more recent years has been for IT contractors, substantially to secure Millennium readiness for IT systems.

Letter from David Hendon to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 November 1999:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your Parliamentary Question about expenditure on external consultants and advisers.

Agency expenditure (ex-VAT) in each of the last four Financial years is as follows

Financial year	*£*
1995–96	256,000
1996–97	761,768
1997–98	2,478,987
1998–99	2,602,017

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 November 1999:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about the amount spent on external consultants and advisors in each of the last four financial years.

The spend on consultants and advisors in each of the last four financial years is as follows:

Year	*Spend £*
1998–99	3,800.00
1997–98	0.00
1996–97	0.00
1995–96	68,862.87

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 November 1999:

You tabled a Parliamentary Question on 3 November to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about expenditure on external consultants and advisors in each of the last four financial years. I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service (ETS) which is an executive agency of the DTI.

The Service spent £3k on consultants in 1997–98 and £117k in 1998–99. Expenditure in years before 1997–98, when the Service was established as an agency, will be included in the figures given by the DTI. The increase in expenditure last year was largely a result of our use of IT consultants in developing a longer term IT strategy for the Service.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what penalties will be applied to the United Kingdom if it fails to meet the legally binding Kyoto greenhouse gas emission targets; and if he will make a statement. [97626]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I have recently returned from the Fifth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The issue of the development of a compliance system for the Kyoto Protocol was one of the key points of discussion at that meeting.

The UK, along with other EU member states, believes that there should be a strong, robust and comprehensive system of compliance for ensuring Parties meet their emissions reductions targets and other commitments undertaken under the Kyoto Protocol. The detailed design of the compliance system for the Protocol, including a full range of actions for failure to meet the Kyoto targets, is still being discussed.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the likely effect on carbon dioxide emissions of the conversion of oil to gas; and if he will make a statement. [97627]

Mrs. Liddell: No such assessment has been made. Compared with the combustion of oil, the combustion of natural gas to meet a particular energy demand usually produces lower emissions of carbon dioxide, due to its lower carbon content.

Working Time Regulations

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to revise the Working Time Regulations. [97817]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Draft regulations to amend the Working Time Regulations, in respect of the requirement to keep records for workers who have opted out of the working time limit and extending the scope of the unmeasured working time exemption, were laid before Parliament on 19 October. They have now been debated in both Houses and will be made shortly.

There is no proposal to revise any other part of the Working Time Regulations at this time.

Trade Barriers (Wood Products)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact

on the world's forests of steps to reduce and eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers to the trade in wood products. [98072]

Mr. Byers: With UK support, the European Commission is currently undertaking a Sustainability Impact Assessment of the new Round of trade negotiations within the WTO which are due to be launched at the third Ministerial meeting in Seattle (30 November to 3 December). This study will consider the range of possible sustainability impacts in trade sectors likely to be affected by the Round, including forest products, and will be used to help inform the UK and EU position on this issue.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the impact on the world's forests of steps to reduce and eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers to the trade in wood products. [98073]

Mr. Byers: The Department has issued a consultation document on UK priorities for tariff reductions in the new Round of multilateral trade negotiations. Replies have been received from a number of interested parties including those concerned with forest preservation and those representing trade in forestry products.

Parental Leave

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice he received from the European Commission when he discussed with it excluding parents of children under five years old but born before 15 December 1999 from the new rights to parental leave; and what legal advice he obtained on the subject. [98241]

Mr. Byers: The Government's discussions with the European Commission cover a wide range of issues. In discussing the extension of the Parental Leave Directive to the UK, we agreed to implement it by 15 December this year, which we are doing through the Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations, in line with our legal advice.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he has discussed excluding parents of children aged under five years but born before 15 December 1999 from the new right to parental leave with the European Commission. [98096]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Parental Leave Directive is based on a Social Chapter agreement which was concluded by the Social Partners. The Directive was adopted by the other member states in June 1996, before the UK opted in to the Social Chapter. The UK Government were not therefore able to influence the discussions and negotiations which led to the conclusion of this Directive. As incoming Government in 1997, we undertook to implement the Directive by 15 December 1999.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he took legal advice about excluding parents of children aged under five years but born before 15 December 1999 from the new right to parental leave; and what advice he was given. [98090]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government are implementing the Parental Leave Directive in accordance with legal advice. The Directive is required to be implemented by 15 December this year.

Consumer Affairs Council

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Consumer Affairs Council held in Brussels on 8 November; and if he will make a statement. [98157]

Dr. Howells: The Council debated the proposed Directive on the Distance Marketing of Financial Services. It was agreed that further work would be needed in order to prepare for a common position. The Council also held an open debate on Services of General Interest. The Commission agreed to look at all the options expressed during the debate. Portugal undertook to take this work forward as a priority under their forthcoming Presidency.

Other matters covered included reports from the Commission on the implementation and enforcement of both the Timeshare and Package Travel Directives, information from the Presidency on the outcome of the Tampere Special European Council on Citizens access to justice and on the recently held European Food 2000 seminar.

Miners

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total amount which has been paid in compensation to ex-miners in Scotland with chronic bronchitis and emphysema; and how much of this is made up of interim payments. [98341]

Mrs. Liddell: The Department has made payments totalling some £2.6 million to ex-miners in Scotland, of which some £2.4 million is made up of interim payments to those ex-miners and their widows who are in receipt of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit for Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ex-miners in Scotland have completed spirometry tests; and of those how many are currently in receipt of industrial injuries benefits. [98342]

Mrs. Liddell: A total of 2,240 ex-miners have completed Spirometry tests at one of the four centres established in Scotland, with a further 1,200 invited to attend. The Department does not hold any figures for the number of claimants in receipt of industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims he has received from ex-miners in Scotland for compensation related to chronic bronchitis and emphysema. [98340]

Mrs. Liddell: The Department's claim handlers have received some 6,900 claims from ex-miners in Scotland.

Anglia TV Shares

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was of his Department's investigations into the alleged insider dealing by Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare in respect of Anglia TV shares. [97209]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the then Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), on 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *50*.

Multinationals

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Government propose to take to enhance the competitive environment in the UK for divisions of multinational companies to stimulate them to continue to make major investments in the UK, with particular reference to those operating in the ice-cream industry. [97752]

Dr. Howells: This Government aim to ensure that the UK is an economy where both indigenous and overseas-owned companies can thrive and compete effectively in world markets. This can only be achieved by maintaining macro-economic stability, and fair and open markets which promote competition. In addition, as detailed in our Competitiveness White Paper launched in December last year, we are actively pursuing a wide range of measures designed to promote the UK as a leading knowledge driven economy.

The UK's strong position as an environment for business continues to be demonstrated by our record levels of inward investment success. We are the market leader for inward investment in Europe, with over 30 per cent. of the total, and second only to the US in terms of inward investment stock.

Telecommunications Masts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to fund research in respect of the possible long-term effects of prolonged exposure to extremely low-intensity radiation from telecommunication masts; and if he will make a statement. [98103]

Ms Hewitt: The Government will be responding to all the recommendations and conclusions of the Science and Technology Committee Report, including those on research.

Vibration White Finger

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will establish a vibration white finger test centre in North Staffordshire; and if he will make a statement. [97800]

Mrs. Liddell: There are currently seven centres in operation, including a centre in Barnsley which opened this week, and we expect a total of twelve centres to be up and running during January 2000. The locations for this initial tranche of centres were determined by balancing the geographic distribution of claimants against the availability of the medical resource needed to undertake the testing. We are assessing the options for opening further centres early next year. I recognise the very strong claims for a centre to serve the North Staffordshire miners, and would certainly hope that we will be able to open a centre in the North Staffordshire area early next year.

E-commerce

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment he has made of the impact of telecommunication costs on the development of e-commerce; and if he will make a statement. [98394]

Ms Hewitt: The Cabinet Office's report e-commerce@its.best.co.uk (http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovations) provides a useful analysis of the issue of access costs. It confirms that the structure and level of tariffs affects on-line behaviour and that some UK tariffs are disadvantageous, but concludes that action is being taken. It recommends that telecoms operators be encouraged to offer a wider range of tariff options.

The Government are committed to ensuring the wide availability of fast and affordable Internet access and believe that competition is the best way to deliver this. The Government want to see operators responding to competitive pressures by offering a broader range of Internet tariff options to allow heavy e-commerce users and light users to choose the optimum package for their usage profile.

Telecommunications

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports he has received of variations in the costs of maintaining and operating the telecommunication infrastructure in different parts of the United Kingdom; and what assessment he has made of the economic impact of such variations. [98395]

Ms Hewitt: OFTEL, the UK's independent telecommunications regulator, carried out a thorough study of the cost of providing a universal telecommunications service throughout the United Kingdom in 1997. This included consideration of the costs of serving areas of the country which would be uneconomic on a normal commercial basis. OFTEL issued a further consultation on universal service in July this year which considered whether the conclusions of the 1997 study were still valid. The consultation period on this document closed on 29 October. OFTEL intend to publish their conclusions early next year.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* advice and *(b)* guidance he has issued to the regulator regarding telecommunication charges; and if he will make a statement. [98396]

Ms Hewitt: Telecommunication charges are crucial to the development of e-commerce in the UK. I discussed this issue when I met with the Director General of Telecommunications on 28 October. However, OFTEL is an independent regulator and it would not be appropriate for me to give him guidance on such issues.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the relationship between the cost of high speed telecommunication and data links and the location of disaster recovery centres; and if he will make a statement. [98397]

Ms Hewitt: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly and place a copy in the Libraries of the House.

Ellington Colliery

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what forms of assistance his Department proposes to make available to deal with the planned closure of Ellington Colliery. [98386]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have asked John Bridge, Chairman of the North East Regional Development Agency, to take the lead in establishing a small Study Team to look at the wider implications of the closure announcement for South East Northumberland.

Working against the framework of the Regional Economic Strategy, which was recently published by the development agency, this team will undertake a rapid analysis of the situation and develop a comprehensive plan for South East Northumberland.

Together with Local Partners, Government Office North East and Central Government, the team's objective will be to provide me with an urgent report before Christmas on the future strategy for this area.

This Government have implemented a wide ranging programme to regenerate the economies and communities affected by pit closures under the previous administration. That programme already applies to the area around Ellington, which suffered from previous job losses in the coalfields. In the light of the Study Team's report, we will consider what more needs to be done.

Industry Council

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the outcome of the Industry Council held in Brussels on 9 November; and if he will make a statement. [98300]

Mrs. Liddell: I represented the UK at the EU Industry Council held on 9 November.

The Council agreed its report to the Helsinki European Council on the integration of industry and sustainable development policy. There was also a discussion of Kyoto targets, where there was general agreement that more effective co-ordination was needed on how to take account of industry's concerns in the implementation of Kyoto targets.

The Council had a debate on competitiveness, which focused on the need for structural change and adaptability in European industry, the importance of SMEs and the role of information and communication technologies in growth and competitiveness.

The Commission presented its first market monitoring report on the world shipbuilding market which highlighted both the serious situation in the market and further clear evidence of unfair pricing by Korea. The Council with strong support from the UK emphasised its serious concern at the situation and unfair pricing from Korea and in its conclusions made clear its determination to tackle such unfair trade practices and agreed further action to this end. The Council called on the Commission and the Presidency to re-engage Korea in bilateral consultations with a view to halting the unfair competition and in parallel urged Industry, member states and the Commission to seek more detailed evidence in order to take appropriate action under the WTO. The Council also emphasised the need to continue to ensure that the conditions of the IMF rescue package were fully respected. The Council ended its conclusions by welcoming the Commission's determination to continue to pursue its obligations under the EU shipbuilding regime and to report on developments as soon as possible.

The new Commission's enterprise policy was set out and focused on promoting entrepreneurship and innovation in Europe, stimulating the growth of SMEs, tackling red tape, addressing failures in the provision of risk capital and promoting an inclusive and cohesive Information Society. The Commission stated that it wanted to see a new innovation policy process which would involve assessing the existing situation in Europe, identifying specific priorities and actions and reporting on measures taken by member states.

A number of delegations stressed the importance of investment in intangibles, particularly the knowledge base, training and life-long learning; the increased use of information technology; and the consolidation of Councils. On the latter, there was support from a number of member states for a more focused approach to competitiveness issues and for merger of the Industry Internal Market Councils as a first step. The Presidency was encouraged to settle issues at the Helsinki European Council.

The Commission also presented its: Communication on the competitiveness of the forest based and related industries; Communication on the competitiveness of the steel industry; Report on the monitoring of aid for steel; Action Plan on the competitiveness of the construction industry; and gave a progress report on the public consultation on it's competition policy modernisation proposals. The Danish delegation introduced a paper on state aid policy which highlighted the damage state aid caused to the Single Market.

The Council also adopted conclusions on the competitiveness of the forest-based and related industries.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Loyalist Hit List

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) on what date the RUC received information that led to a south Belfast woman being told on 15 May that her name had been discovered on a Loyalist hit list; how many other names were on this list; how many of these individuals have been notified; on what dates the individuals were notified; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this threat; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94482]

(2) on what date the RUC received information that names and personal details of a number of Catholics in the Belfast area had been discovered on a Loyalist hit list; how many other names were on this list; how many of these individuals have been notified; on what dates the individuals were notified; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this threat; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94480]

(3) on what date the RUC received information that led to Mr. Gerard Rice being told on 17 May that his name, address and details about his car had been

discovered on a loyalist death list; how many other names were on this list; how many of those individuals have been notified; on what dates the individuals were notified; what conclusions have been reached so far as on perpetrators of the threat; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94484]

(4) what steps the RUC took following information passed on to a community worker in the Ardoyne area on 6 May that her name had been discovered on a Loyalist death list; how many other names were on this list; how many of these individuals have been notified; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this threat; and what is the present stage of the police investigation. [94475]

Mr. Ingram: As a person has been charged with possession of documents useful to terrorists I am unable to give a detailed response. However, I can confirm that the RUC seized material in February including personal details of more than 150 persons.

There was no indication that an attack was imminent or actively being planned; it was assessed that the details were being collated. The list was then fully researched for accuracy and currency. If at any stage there had been any reason to fear imminent attacks, immediate steps would have been taken. The research having been completed, all persons were notified between May and August.

I understand the RUC informed a community worker in the Ardoyne area of Belfast on 14 May, not 6 May.

Caffrey's Bar

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many (i) service and (ii) police personnel were on duty and patrolling the Falls road, Belfast in the vicinity of Caffrey's bar *(a)* from 10 am to 11 pm on 20 May, *(b)* on 20 April and *(c)* on 20 March; and what was the time of the last patrol before midnight on 20 May; [94629]

(2) what steps the RUC took following a grenade attack outside of Caffrey's pub in the early morning of 21 May; what damage and injuries were caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrator of the attack and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94488]

(3) how many surveillance cameras cover *(a)* the Falls road, Belfast in the vicinity of Caffrey's bar and *(b)* the Broadway road and M1 roundabout; if the cameras were functional from 10 pm on 20 May to 2 am on 21 May; if the cameras were monitored through those hours; what action was taken following the grenade-bomb attack on Caffrey's bar; at what time was radio contact made with the RUC concerning the incident; and when a request was received from the RUC to remove and examine the surveillance recording; [94628]

(4) *(a)* at what time police were notified of a grenade-bomb attack on Caffrey's bar on the Falls road, Belfast in the early hours of 21 May, *(b)* at what time the police arrived on the scene and *(c)* what efforts were made to pursue, find and trace the owner of the get-away car. [94630]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The Army were not on patrol during the periods given. It is not possible to be specific as to when a particular patrol may have been in the vicinity of a particular building. As an arterial route, the Falls road is used by many police vehicles during the course of a normal day.

The scene was preserved by police between 0105 and 0418 hours. A full investigation was initiated. Two persons received minor shrapnel wounds to legs and arms and further injuries of shock and hearing difficulties were reported later. Damage was caused to three windows of Caffrey's bar and one to the Red Devil bar on the opposite side of the road. It is believed that the attack was carried out by a Loyalist group although no claim of responsibility has been made. The investigation is continuing.

I understand the RUC operate no cameras in the area. However, as part of their investigation they viewed video tapes from the military observation post at Broadway Tower. They proved not to be useful.

The police were notified at 0035 hours on 21 May but were unable to gain access because of a large and hostile crowd. Police gained access at 0105 hours. The getaway vehicle was initially reported as a white car, later as a particular make with a registration number. Nearby loyalist areas were checked with negative results. The vehicle was recovered a number of days later in the York road area of Belfast. It had been purchased with cash from a car dealer in Bangor some two days before the incident by persons using false names.

Car Theft

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at what time on 17 May 1974 the police first received and logged the reported theft or hijacking in Belfast of *(a)* an Austin 1800, registration number HOI 2487, *(b)* a Hillman Avenger, registration number DIA 4063, *(c)* a Ford Escort, registration number 1385 WZ, and, in Portadown, *(d)* a Hillman Minx registration number 6583 OZ. [93527]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* Given the passage of time, many documents from this period have not been retained. The RUC have however traced a composite paper prepared for the general information of senior officers at the time. This is a summary of the day and does not contain all the information requested but records the following:

> An Austin 1800, registration number HOI 2487 was hi-jacked at Richmond Street, Belfast at 0830 hours on Friday 17 May 1974. It was reported to police at 1520 hours.
>
> A Hillman Avenger, registration number DOI 4063 was stolen from Torrens Road, Belfast at 1000 hours. It was reported to police at 1630 hours.

Information on the two remaining cars cannot for the present be traced.

Explosive Device (Garvaghy Road)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the RUC took following reports of an explosive device being thrown from a car travelling in the Garvaghy road area of Portadown on 16 May; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; and at what stage is the police investigation. [94483]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* Police investigated this incident which was reported at 2333 hours by a person whose given name and address do not exist. The area was checked at 2339 hours with no sign of damage. At 0019 hours a mobile support unit extensively checked the area without result. At 0145 hours they again checked the area and spoke with a person who, while allegedly knowing the names of witnesses, refused to give details other than that a device had been thrown from a red Peugeot car. A further search was undertaken at first light but found nothing to support the allegation. A local resident suggested that the noise had come from the park itself and may have been a firework. In the absence of any witnesses, injury, damage, physical or forensic evidence the conclusion reached was that the explosion may have been a firework. Further investigation is therefore held pending additional information being received.

Violent Incidents

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the RUC took following (1) the petrol bomb attack on the home of a family in Armagh on 9 May; what damage was caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this attack; what other attacks took place in that area at the time; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94478]

(2) the attack on a man and two women in the village area of Belfast on 2 May; what injuries were sustained in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [94470]

(3) the pipe bomb attack on the home of a couple living in south Belfast on 5 May; what injuries were sustained in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this attack; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [94474]

(4) the attack on two people near the corner of Landsdowne and Antrim road on 4 May; what injuries were sustained in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this attack; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [94472]

(5) the attack on a 29-year old man in Lurgan on 7 May; what injuries were sustained in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this attack; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94476]

(6) a petrol bomb attack on a house in Derry on 31 May; what damage and injuries were caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94492]

(7) the attack on a man near a building site in Carrickfergus on 13 May; what injuries were caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this attack; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94479]

(8) the stone-throwing attack in My Lady's road in Belfast on 19 May against a bus carrying students from St. Joseph's College; what injuries were caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; what other attacks took place in that area at that time; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94487]

(9) the attack on a man near the Mourneview estate in Lurgan on 2 May; what injuries were sustained in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this attack; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [94471]

(10) the pipe bomb attack on a home in Armagh on 28 May; what damage and injuries were caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; what previous attacks on this family and their home have been recorded; and what is the present stage of police investigations; [94491]

(11) the arson attack on the Orange hall in Donaghmore, County Tyrone on 15 May; what damage was caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; what other attacks took place in that area at that time; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94481]

(12) the shooting attack on the vehicle of a youth worker in the Shankill area of Belfast on 21 May; what damage and injuries were caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrator of the attack; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94489]

(13) the attack on two 12-year-old boys in the Ardoyne area on 5 May; what injuries were sustained in the course of the attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; and at what stage is the investigation; [94473]

(14) the arson attack on a home on the Antiville estate, East Antrim on 18 May; what damage and injuries were caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of the attack; what other attacks took place in that area at that time; and what is the present stage of the police investigation; [94485]

(15) the petrol bomb on the home of a man in the Parkhall Estate in Antrim on the early morning of 9 May; what damage was caused in the course of this attack; what conclusions have been reached so far as to the perpetrators of this attack; what other attacks took place in that area at that time; and what is the present stage of the police investigation. [94477]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 October 1999]:* The dates given in four of the questions appear to be inaccurate. These incidents have all been thoroughly investigated by the police. They include a range of assaults and damage to property.

For several of these incidents the police have not established a definitive motive, but in most cases the motive is believed to have been sectarian and in some instances they were probably perpetrated by paramilitaries.

I understand in relation to the incidents raised, 22 people were arrested and released without charge, one person was convicted of assault and sentenced to six

months' imprisonment and criminal proceedings are pending against another individual. Some investigations are still ongoing and others remain open but are subject to additional information becoming available.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in date order for each of the past five years, arson attacks on churches of each denomination stating in each case *(a)* a description of the damage to church property and estimated cost of repairs, *(b)* his conclusions on the perceived community affiliation of the perpetrators and *(c)* the arrests made, charges brought, successful prosecutions and sentences awarded. [95380]

Mr. Ingram: There have been 172 recorded attacks on churches and church property during the years 1994 to 1998, details of which have been placed in the Library of the House. The remaining information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the RUC took following (1) a call for assistance to be given to a 15 year-old boy being assaulted on Garvaghy road, Portadown on 28 July; where and how many police vehicles of what type were in the vicinity; where the vehicles were positioned in relation to the scene of the assault; what assistance was given; what injuries were sustained by the victim; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95396]

(2) the report of a pipe bomb left outside a residential property in Ballycastle, County Antrim on 8 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95375]

(3) the report of an arson attack on the Protestant Mission Hall in Tobermore, County Londonderry on 4 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation. [95382]

(4) the report of an explosive device found outside the GAA club in Dungannon, County Tyrone on 23 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95379]

(5) the report of an assault in the Stewartstown road in front of Woodbourne RUC station on the night of 24–25 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what injuries were sustained by the victim; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95394]

(6) the report of an attack on the Tullintrain Orange Hall just outside of Derry City on 14 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95377]

(7) the discovery on 9 June of an explosive device at the postal sorting office in Larne, County Antrim; how many persons were evacuated; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what record of similar incidents exists in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95393]

(8) reports of an assault upon a taxi driver outside the Royal Victoria Hospital in West Belfast on 31 July; what injuries were sustained by the victim; what is his estimate of damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95398]

(9) the report of attacks on a residential property in the Waterside district of Derry at approximately 4.00 am on 29 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95397]

(10) the reports of arson attacks on *(a)* St. Patrick's Church in Derriaghy, County Antrim, *(b)* St. Patrick's Church in Chapel Hill, Lisburn, County Antrim and *(c)* St. Coleman's Church in Hillsborough on 11 July; in each case, how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95376]

(11) the discovery on 7 June of a pipe bomb on the grounds of St. Mary's primary school in Ballymena, County Antrim; how many children were evacuated; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95392]

(12) the report of an arson attack on two homes in the Graymount Crescent are of north Belfast on 7 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his

estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95383]

(13) the report of a pipe bomb attack on a Catholic church in Moneymore, County Derry on 27 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95395]

(14) the report of a paramilitary assault on a man in his home in Ballymoney, County Antrim on 15 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95378]

(15) the report of an arson attack on the Orange Hall in Warrenpoint, County Down on 4 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95381]

(16) the report of attacks on a video shop in Carrickfergus, County Antrim on 8 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95374]

(17) the discovery on 16 June of a pipe bomb on the grounds of St. Mary's primary school in Newtownbutler, County Fermanagh; how many children were evacuated; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation. [95385]

Mr. Ingram: The dates given in several of the questions appear to be inaccurate. These incidents have all been thoroughly investigated by the police, except the suggested attack on St. Coleman's Church in Hillsborough since the RUC have no record of such an incident on or around 11 July.

The incidents listed include a range of assaults, arson and pipe bomb attacks, robbery and assault, a paramilitary attack and in some instances no injuries or damage were sustained.

The time taken for the RUC to arrive at the scene in the incidents requested is as follows:

Following the discovery of a pipe bomb outside a home in Ballycastle on 8 July the incident was reported at 1027 hours and the police attended the scene at 1037 hours.

An arson attack on a Mission Hall in Tobermore, Co. Londonderry was reported to the RUC at 0735 hours, they arrived on the scene at 0740 hours on 4 July.

The RUC received a report following the discovery of a pipe bomb outside a GAA club in Dungannon at 0725 hours on 23 July. Two possible sites were checked and police arrived at the scene of the second at 0742 hours.

The incident on the Stewartstown road is alleged to have occurred at 0130 hours on 24 July, it was reported to police at 1410 hours.

Police took approximately 25 minutes to arrive at the scene of the attack on Tullintrain Orange Hall on 14 July.

The discovery of an explosive device at the Royal Mail Sorting Office in Larne, Co. Antrim was reported at 0640 hours, police attended the scene at 0648 hours.

The incident at the Waterside area of Londonderry was reported at 0445 hours, the police arrived at the scene at 0458 hours on 29 July.

On 11 July at 0021 hours police received a report of an arson attack on St. Patrick's Church, Derriaghy, they attended the scene at 0049 hours. On the same date at 0328 hours a report was received that St. Patrick's Church, Lisburn had been attacked. The police arrived some minutes later.

On 7 June the RUC received a report at 0812 hours following the discovery of a pipe bomb in the grounds of St. Mary's Primary School, Ballymena. They arrived at the scene at 0815 hours.

Police responded within minutes to a report of an arson attack in North Belfast on 7 July.

Police received a report of an attack on a church in Moneymore, Co. Londonderry at 0235 hours on 28 July. They arrived at the scene at 0301 hours having first checked the authenticity of the telephone call.

Police received a report of an assault in Ballymoney at 2339 hours on 15 July. They attended the scene at 2341 hours.

At 0430 hours on 4 July police received a report of an attack on Warrenpoint Orange Hall, they attended the scene at approximately 0434 hours.

At 0324 hours on 8 July police received a report following an attack on a shop in Carrickfergus, they arrived on the scene at 0330 hours.

A report was received at 0750 hours on 16 June of the discovery of a pipe bomb in the grounds of St. Mary's Primary School, Newtownbutler. The RUC attended at 0813 hours. The school had not opened. The police operation terminated at 1240 hours.

With regard to some of the incidents it is possible that parades may have contributed to heightened tensions in that area, in other incidents parades are thought not to have had any bearing.

In some of these incidents the police have not established a motive or reached a conclusion as to the perpetrators. Other incidents are believed to have been sectarian, and some were probably carried out by paramilitaries.

I understand that proceedings are pending against six people. In respect of one incident a file was forwarded to the DPP, however the suspect was subsequently found dead (no crime is suspected), and the police are not seeking anyone else in respect of this offence. In the other cases investigations are either ongoing or they remain open but are dependent on further information becoming available.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* pipe bomb and *(b)* petrol attacks took place in (i) Nationalist and (ii) Loyalist areas over the weekend of Friday 3 June to Sunday 5 June; in each case, how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what damage was caused; what injuries were sustained by the victims; what conclusions he has reached so far on the community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation. [95391]

Mr. Ingram: There were six bombing incidents during the weekend of 4–6 June as follows:

4 June at Castlewellan Road, Hilltown. Reported at 2336 hours. Police attended the scene at 2355 hours. Windows damaged. No injuries. Perpetrators believed to be Loyalist. Investigation continuing.

5 June at Clandeboye Gardens, Belfast. Reported at 0044 hours. Police attended the scene at 0053 hours. No damage. No injuries. Perpetrators believed to be Loyalist. Investigation continuing.

5 June at Corcrain Drive, Portadown. Reported at 0053 hours. Police attended the scene at 0056 hours. Fatal injuries. Perpetrators believed to be Loyalist. Murder investigation continuing.

5 June at Westland Road, Portadown. Following up inquiries into the attack at Corcrain Drive, police discovered the scene of another blast at 0109 hours. A lounge window was broken. No injuries. Perpetrators believed to be Loyalist. Investigation continuing.

5 June at St Matthew's Court, Belfast. Reported at 1257 hours. Police attended the scene at 1307 hours. No damage. No injuries. Perpetrators believed to be Loyalist. Investigation continuing.

6 June at Acacia Avenue, Belfast. Reported at 1329 hours. Police attended the scene at 1357 hours. Minor damage caused to brickwork below a living room window. No injuries. Perpetrators believed to be Loyalist. Investigation continuing.

There were four petrol bomb attacks during the same period as follows:

5 June at Windsor Avenue, Lurgan. Police vehicle attacked. No damage. No injuries. No offender identified.

5 June at Windsor Avenue, Lurgan. At 1652 hours police reported petrol bombs being thrown in a car park. A car was damaged. There were no injuries. It is believed that the perpetrators were from a Nationalist background. No one was identified.

5 June at Lisnahull Park, Dungannon. The injured party reported at 1303 hours on 11 June that a petrol bomb had been thrown at her home on 5 June. Police attended the scene at 1405 hours. A week had elapsed and damage appeared restricted to scorch marks to an area of pavement and to a wall. No injuries were reported. Perpetrators or their community affiliation are unknown. Investigation continuing.

6 June at Campbell Walk/Levin Road, Lurgan. A police unit was attacked. No damage. No injuries. No one was identified.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the RUC took following the report of attacks on residential properties in the Markets area of Belfast on 8 July; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what is his estimate of the damage to property; what record exists of similar incidents in that area; what bearing controversial parades have on these actions; what conclusions he has reached so far on the number and community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation. [95384]

Mr. Ingram: There are no records of such attacks on or around 8 July.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the RUC took (1) following reports of intimidation of Mr. James McCarry by masked men outside his home in Ballycastle, County Antrim on 17 June; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what damage was done and what injuries were caused; what conclusions he has reached so far on the community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95386]

(2) following an early morning petrol bomb attack on 2 June at a home on Moorlough Road, Strabane, County Tyrone; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what damage was caused; what injuries were sustained by the victims; what conclusions he has reached so far on the community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95389]

(3) following a reported attack in the Brompton Park Estate in North Belfast on 26 June; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what damage was caused; what injuries were sustained by the victims; what conclusions he has reached so far on the community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95387]

(4) on 1 June following an attack on two men when a stolen car mounted the pavement outside the Royal Bar at Sandy Row in South Belfast; how long it took for police to arrive on the scene; what injuries were sustained by the victims; what conclusions he has reached so far on the community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation; [95388]

(5) following an early morning blast bomb attack on 5 June at the home of Elizabeth O'Neill in Portadown; how long it took police to arrive on the scene; what damage was caused; what injuries were sustained by the victims; what conclusions he has reached so far on the community affiliation of the perpetrators; and what is the present stage of the investigation. [95390]

Mr. Ingram: The dates given in two of the questions appear to be inaccurate. These incidents have all been thoroughly investigated by the police. They include assault, intimidation, damage to property and, most seriously, the murder of Mrs. Elizabeth O'Neill during the course of an attack on her home in Portadown on 5 June.

The time taken for the RUC to arrive at the scene in the incidents requested is as follows:

The RUC received a report at 2219 hours on 16 June regarding an incident in Ballycastle, Co. Antrim, they arrived on the scene at 2226 hours.

The RUC received a report in respect of a petrol bombing at a home in Moorlough road, Strabane at 0232 hours on 1 June, they arrived on the scene at 0240 hours.

A number of emergency calls were made on the morning of 26 June, the first was received at 0450 hours and the police arrived at the scene at approximately 0454 hours. A number of further calls were received and units from other areas attended a series of incidents involving groups of Catholics and Protestants in the Brompton Park Estate area of Belfast.

An alleged assault in the Sandy Row area of Belfast was reported to the RUC at 2203 hours on 1 June, they arrived at the scene at 2205 hours.

The incident involving the attack on the home and murder of Elizabeth O'Neill was reported at 0053 hours on 5 June, police attended the scene at 0056 hours.

In respect of these incidents the police have either not established a definitive motive or they believe the motive to have been sectarian. Police believe the attack on the home and murder of Elizabeth O'Neill to have been carried out by a Loyalist grouping.

I understand, in relation to the incidents raised, a file in respect of two people has been sent to the DPP, the murder investigation is still ongoing and the other investigations remain open but are subject to additional information becoming available.

GM Crops

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many trials of genetically engineered crops are taking place in Northern Ireland; how many applications to proceed with trials of genetically modified crops have been submitted for approval in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the issue of genetically-modified crops. [93837]

Mr. George Howarth: The Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland is a Competent Authority within the United Kingdom for carrying out the regulatory requirements of EU Directive 90/220/EC to control the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms.

In 1996 the Department received the only application so far for a release consent in Northern Ireland from the Department of Agriculture (Northern Ireland) to carry out a small field trial on potatoes. This application, which was approved, was dealt with through the regulatory system and papers about it are available for viewing in a statutory public register, which is held by the Department of the Environment's Environmental Policy Division in River House, 48 High Street, Belfast BT1 2AW.

There are currently no trials of genetically engineered crops taking place in Northern Ireland.

In the Department's capacity as a Competent Authority, it liaises, along with other UK Competent Authorities, with all EU member states, including the Republic of Ireland, at Competent Authority meetings. Liaison with the Republic of Ireland authority has otherwise been as required.

Pellet Guns

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* legal and *(b)* illegal ball-bearing pellet guns in circulation; how many reports of incidents involving the use of these weapons have been received by the (i) police and (ii) other agencies in each of the last five years. [95426]

Mr. Ingram: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to low powered airguns or CO2 guns rather than conventional air weapons.

As those that fire plastic pellets are not, in most cases, considered to be lethal barrelled firearms and do not require firearms certificates, the numbers in circulation are not known.

As regards incidents of misuse of these kinds of guns, for instance with ball-bearings, the information is not held centrally by the police and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Illegal Parades

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the date, location and perceived political or community affiliation of each illegal parade that took place from March to September; on which occasions files were later sent from the police to the Director of Public Prosecutions; in each instance how many prosecutions and on what charges were initiated; what was the result of each prosecution; for each illegal parade where no prosecutions followed, what reasons were given for a failure to prosecute; what other actions were taken to ensure future compliance with the law; and if he will make a statement on the community balance of the prosecution decision-making process over this period. [95372]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 27 October 1999]:* At the following illegal parades no persons were identified and consequently no prosecution files could be prepared:

Illegal parades March-September 1999

Date	*Location*	*Perceived affiliation*
4 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
15 March 1999	Garvaghy Road, Portadown	Nationalist
16 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
16 March 1999	Lurgan	Nationalist
17 March 1999	New Lodge Road, Belfast	Nationalist
17 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
18 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
19 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
25 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
20 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
22 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
23 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
1 April 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
4 April 1999	Camlough	Nationalist
13 April 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
6 May 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
8 May 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
8 May 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
20 May 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
25 May 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
3 June 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
5 June 1999	Jonesborough	Nationalist
16 June 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
17 June 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
21 June 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
5 July 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
6 July 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
7 July 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
8 July 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
9 July 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
12 July 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
12 July 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
13 July 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
17 July 1999	Portavogie	Loyalist

As a result of the following illegal parades the RUC have reported nine Loyalists to the Director of Public Prosecutions for taking part in an illegal parade and are awaiting direction. A further thirty-two are to be reported.

Date	Location	Perceived affiliation
12 March 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
29 April 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist
19 June 1999	Drumcree, Portadown	Loyalist

There have been no illegal parades since July. Police take action against any individuals who can be identified and against whom, under section 6 of the Public Processions (NI) Act 1998, a degree of guilty knowledge can be sustained.

RUC Overtime

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums were budgeted for in respect of RUC overtime in each of the last five years and the current year; how much was expended on overtime in each of these years and the current year to date; what was the number of hours provided for in each of these years and the current year; and how many of these hours were actually used by the RUC. [97376]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is shown in the table.

Year	Original budget provision (£ million)	Actual expenditure (£ million)	Number of hours provided in budget man hours (million)	Number of hours actually worked man hours (million)
1994–95	81.77	75.66	6.18	5.72
1995–96	54.65	51.09	3.97	3.68
1996–97	37.25	68.63	2.57	4.65
1997–98	61.90	64.93	4.29	4.37
1998–99	51.47	61.44	3.41	3.93
1999–2000	42.26	30.87	2.58	1.93

Note:
7 month period from April to October 1999

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums were allowed in the RUC budget in each police subdivision in each of the last five years and the current year, for police overtime; how many hours these sums represented; and how many of these hours were actually used in each sub-division. [97559]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not available in the form requested, i.e. no budgeted hours and costs at Sub-Divisional level. However, the following table shows the number of hours of overtime paid in each Sub-division in each of the last five years and for seven months of the current financial year.

Sub-division	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–100
Antrim	110,492	87,929	87,705	82,709	73,131	25,499
Antrim Road	127,067	67,562	94,485	89,759	66,410	26,512
Armagh	197,958	114,862	213,049	144,645	172,834	71,968
Ballymena	79,889	56,903	76,409	73,504	66,759	28,513
Ballymoney	56,772	42,557	88,208	54,889	53,842	25,443
Banbridge	67,786	44,148	82,661	72,864	93,491	31,896
Bangor	90,405	67,380	132,415	97,123	90,912	35,977
Carrickfergus	61,989	43,843	48,727	43,436	41,600	18,210
Castlereagh	92,790	57,609	95,371	98,310	63,229	26,874
Coleraine	94,267	71,085	96,038	83,190	79,047	36,069
Cookstown	127,193	78,753	147,882	99,669	90,231	34,162
Donegall Pass	144,746	93,326	86,622	81,572	66,663	24,291
Downpatrick	88,747	55,533	92,456	84,514	80,009	27,782
Dungannon	199,184	135,869	178,781	127,463	143,925	58,288
Dunmurry	135,069	88,957	92,312	78,338	63,005	24,719
Enniskillen	176,074	112,503	174,659	132,214	125,719	49,787
Grosvenor Road	270,348	142,314	209,257	179,117	146,764	68,731
Larne	55,431	41,407	50,877	46,343	46,679	17,551
Limavady	60,104	38,337	58,205	55,735	45,298	18,621
Lisburn	182,235	110,702	145,343	126,615	101,561	44,257
Lisnaskea	182,386	92,586	143,078	123,559	100,764	43,312
Lurgan	109,538	69,044	107,205	111,453	135,101	46,948
Magherafelt	106,873	68,209	113,544	97,138	80,955	41,948
Mountpottinger	104,875	60,413	75,296	74,942	68,098	29,832
Musgrave Street	173,871	113,312	111,276	87,506	77,329	26,737
Newcastle	68,804	40,860	59,212	53,856	69,317	22,811
Newry	383,381	182,427	359,088	236,005	234,766	108,977
Newtownabbey	89,304	53,860	72,782	70,398	69,655	37,267
Newtownards	95,088	73,064	111,780	99,089	120,130	48,280
North Queen Street	121,301	76,358	100,802	107,384	85,096	35,016
Omagh	153,947	95,845	144,250	113,580	112,682	37,700
Portadown	70,235	50,947	73,340	69,118	92,050	40,425
Stormont	120,771	64,850	62,879	80,230	46,407	17,302
Strabane	127,890	97,865	142,770	102,023	84,279	27,836
Strand Road	223,987	127,743	171,788	116,450	102,718	38,744
Strandtown	88,482	59,371	71,108	87,134	69,519	32,952
Tennent Street	112,561	53,703	64,837	52,690	46,438	13,599
Waterside	84,176	46,228	94,752	71,840	54,675	24,710
Woodbourne	145,612	99,828	137,453	138,444	114,978	47,691

Accelerated Prisoner Release

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners released under the accelerated prisoner release scheme have since been arrested in connection with terrorist-related offences. [97747]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* While offences are under investigation it is not always clear whether they are terrorist related.

In none of the cases where prisoners released under the scheme have since been arrested is there conclusive evidence to confirm the offence was terrorist related.

Suckler Calves

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average price paid in *(a)* September and *(b)* October, in 1999, 1998, 1997, 1996, 1995, 1990 and 1985 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms, for suckler calves in the principal markets for such stock in Northern Ireland. [97825]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Estimates of prices paid for suckled calves in a sample of the main markets in Norther Ireland in September and October of the years shown are given in the table, in current prices and in real terms.

Prices of suckled calves in Northern Ireland

£ per head

	Current prices		*Prices in Real Terms using September 1999 as the base*	
	September	*October*	*September*	*October*
1985	225.20	227.81	392.33	396.19
1990	246.58	282.77	316.94	360.68
1995	[1]—	436.42	[1]—	483.84
1996	[1]—	326.17	[1]—	352.62
1997	[1]—	327.77	[1]—	341.43
1998	143.64	210.79	145.24	212.92
1999	166.83	232.09	166.83	231.86

[1] No sales recorded in these months

Demilitarisation and Normalisation Programmes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made concerning the demilitarisation and normalisation programme since June 1998; and if he will make a statement. [97762]

Mr. Ingram: The Government are committed to the objective of as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements in Northern Ireland, consistent with the level of threat.

Major progress has already been made. Since the Good Friday Agreement, routine military patrolling has been reduced by two thirds. Three battalions have been returned to Great Britain. There are now under 15,000 service personnel on operational duties in Northern Ireland, fewer than at any time since 1970. In large parts of the Province the police patrol without any military assistance. Since April 1998 11 military bases have been demolished and a further seven installations have been closed.

Compensation Awards

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average compensation award made to *(a)* victims and *(b)* relatives of victims of paramilitary violence for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [98362]

Mr. Ingram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Compensation Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. Denis Stanley. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D.A. Stanley to Mr. Laurence Robertson, dated 10 November 1999:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your recent Question about criminal injuries compensation in Northern Ireland.

The Compensation Agency cannot provide information about the cost of compensation stemming specifically from paramilitary violence as there is often no way of ascertaining the motives of a victim's assailants unless a prosecution follows. In many cases where the assailant(s) are unknown, or where no prosecution has taken place, the Agency could only speculate about the perpetrator's motives and consequently figures provided on that basis would be very unreliable.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the President of the Council what languages other than English have been used in advertising designed to convey the Government's message about year 2000 compliance to ethnic minority communities. [98424]

Mrs. Beckett: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list by unit of delivery the number of qualifications gained by those who have completed *(a)* the full-time education and training option and *(b)* other options on the New Deal for 18–24 year olds since January 1998; [95087]

(2) if he will list by unit of delivery the number and percentage of 18–24 year olds who have left the New Deal for jobs lasting less than 13 weeks since January 1998; [95084]

(3) if he will list by unit of delivery *(a)* the number of those who have completed the full-time education and training option of the New Deal for 18–24 year olds and *(b)* the percentage of these who have left to sustained unsubsidised jobs; [95085]

(4) if he will list by unit of delivery the number and percentage of those who have left the New Deal for 18–24 year olds before taking up one of the options. [95089]

Ms Jowell: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of people leaving the new deal for 18 to 24 year olds had by the end of August returned to the new deal or jobseeker's allowance *(a)* within 13 weeks, *(b)* within 26 weeks and *(c)* within 52 weeks. [98187]

Ms Jowell: I will write to my right hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

University for Industry

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the proposed Learning and Skills Council will have any responsibility for funding students learning with the University for Industry. [98143]

Mr. Wicks: The Learning and Skills Council will be responsible for funding all post-16 education and training apart from work-based training for adults, which will be the responsibility of the Employment Service. Funding for University for Industry students is being considered in the context of developing the proposals set out in "Learning to Succeed" and the Government's spending review next year.

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions he has had with the Further Education Funding Council about the funding of persons studying with the University for Industry. [98141]

Mr. Wicks: The Department is in regular contact with the Further Education Funding Council about such funding. Following guidance from the Secretary of State, the Council has earmarked £20.25 million to support Ufl learners from within its total grant-in-aid for 2000–01. Discussions are underway between the Department, the Council and Ufl Ltd. on funding Ufl learners from 2001–02 onwards.

Curriculum 2000

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects the specifications for Curriculum 2000 to be published. [98142]

Mr. Wicks: The finalised specifications for the new GCE Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level qualifications and the new General National Vocational Qualifications to be introduced for teaching from September 2000 will be available to schools and colleges in January 2000. Draft versions of the AS and A level specifications are already available on the awarding bodies' websites.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the grammar schools visited by himself or his Ministers since May 1997, identifying the Minister in each case. [98144]

Ms Estelle Morris: In the course of their work, Ministers visit around 300 schools each year, some of which are grammar schools. Visits are based on invitations received. We do not have a breakdown of visits by type of school.

Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average unit of resource derived from public funds and authorised tuition fees, where applicable, was for a full-time equivalent student at a higher education institution in England for the past three academic years; and what figure is projected for the current year. [98240]

Mr. Wicks: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

"Learning to Succeed"

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures he is taking to maintain morale and staff retention and to give advice and assistance to those employed by organisations likely to be affected by proposals in "Learning to Succeed" (Cm. 4392); with particular reference to *(a)* the Further Education Funding Council, *(b)* training and enterprise councils; and *(c)* the training standards council; and if he will make a statement. [98099]

Mr. Wicks: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Trainee Teachers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies he has made into differences in the course drop-out rate for trainee teachers according to *(a)* whether they are on Bachelor or Postgraduate Certificate of Education courses, *(b)* their gender, *(c)* their ethnic origin and *(d)* whether or not they are disabled; and if he will make a statement. [98100]

Ms Estelle Morris: The proportion of those who start initial teacher training courses who do not gain qualified teacher status is estimated to be 29 per cent. for undergraduate courses and 13 per cent. for postgraduate courses, based on those gaining qualified teacher status from October 1997 to September 1998.

Information on gender, ethnic origin and disabled status is not available.

The Initial Teacher Training performance profiles, published by the Teacher Training Agency in September 1999, show the percentage of final year trainees in 1997–98 who had gained qualified teacher status by 31 July 1998, split by postgraduate and undergraduate trainees. For primary initial teacher training 90 per cent. of final year undergraduates and 85 per cent. of final year postgraduates gained qualified teacher training. Figures for secondary initial teacher training are given for individual subjects. These figures do not take into account drop-out during earlier years of the course, which mainly applies to undergraduate trainees, or of those who gained qualified teacher status after 31 July 1998.

Computer Rental

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he intends to introduce the scheme to provide for the low cost rental of computers to low income families. [97914]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* The initiative to offer subsidised recycled computers at low personal cost to low-income learners and families will begin operating in Spring 2000 on a pilot basis. The prospectus inviting responses from interested organisations wishing to participate will be issued later this month.

New Deal Trainees

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many New Deal trainees on the full-time education option have progressed to Level 3 courses; [97906]

(2) what assessment he has made of the comparative administration costs associated with *(a)* New Deal trainees and *(b)* FEFC-funded students in further education colleges; [97904]

(3) what guidance he has issued to the Employment Service in respect of the exceptional circumstances in which New Deal trainees taking the full-time education option can progress to Level 3 courses. [97905]

Ms Jowell: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Advanced Skills Teachers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of advanced skills teachers who will be in post in each of the next five years. [97845]

Ms Estelle Morris: Estimates have not been made for each of the next five years, but it is planned to expand the number of advanced skills teachers to about 10,000 in the longer term.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many advanced skills teachers are currently in post; and if he will give a breakdown of the number of advanced skills teachers in *(a)* each local education authority and *(b)* each education action zone in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools. [97847]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information is not yet available. Detailed information for January 2000 is being collected from local authorities and should be available by April 2000.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average pay of advanced skills teachers. [97848]

Ms Estelle Morris: This information is not held centrally at present.

Sure Start

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) for what Sure Start areas incidences of low birthweight and teenage pregnancy have been selection criteria; [95541]

(2) what geographical size of area can apply for Sure Start funding; [95514]

(3) how the areas applying for Sure Start funds are assessed against each of the three selection criteria; and what weight is given to each of the three criteria in the selection process. [95513]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The 60 areas of the country invited to develop a Sure Start programme in the first round were selected because they scored highly on an index of local deprivation, already had existing local projects which demonstrated many of the key aspects of Sure Start, and provided an opportunity for Sure Start to develop in a range of different settings. Local partners decided on the Sure Start catchment area within their district.

Guidance on the choice of area, including its size, is in the booklet, "Sure Start: a guide for trailblazers" which is available in the Library. Becoming a Sure Start programme is not a competitive process, and no further assessment is made centrally provided the catchment area chosen is consistent with the guidance.

Incidences of low birthweight and teenage pregnancy were factors in the criteria for selection of all 60 areas since, along with the index of local deprivation, these are factors which point to areas where children's needs are pressing.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each of the Start Trailblazers, how many new child care places for children aged 0–5 years will be created in *(a)* playgroups, *(b)* child minders and *(c)* nurseries as part of the Sure Start Programme. [95170]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not currently available. However, we will get regular data from programmes once they are running on the total number of children and families helped against milestones set in their delivery plans. The 60 trailblazer programmes are producing delivery plans for approval for Ministers. Each programme is required to ensure access to good quality play, learning and child care for young children.

Disability (Yorkshire and Humberside)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of people employed by each local authority in Yorkshire and Humberside are registered disabled. [98032]

Ms Hodge: The information requested is not available because there is no longer any requirement for disabled people to register as disabled. Those parts of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 which were about registration were repealed when the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 came into force on 2 December 1996.

Teacher Pensions (Shropshire)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the estimated increase is in the cost of teachers' pensions in Shropshire for 2000–01 compared with 1999–2000; and how this will be funded. [98165]

Mr. Wicks: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Kent Education Business Partnership

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has for the future funding of the Kent Education Business Partnership; and if he will make a statement. [98083]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are working closely with the National Education Business Partnership Network and others to determine how best to ensure a smooth transition period for Education Business Partnerships prior to the introduction of the Learning and Skills Council. Many EBPs, including Kent, carry out excellent work. This work will be further enhanced by the additional funding for enterprise skills in schools announced in the Pre Budget Report on 9 November.

New Deal (25 Plus)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the unit cost is of funding a student on an access course under the New Deal 25 plus programme. [97135]

Ms Jowell: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Head Teachers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations he has received from head teachers on *(a)* improving school performance and *(b)* performance-related pay for heads; and if he will make a statement. [98281]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State receives letters on various subjects from headteachers, and Ministers and officials have regular discussions with the associations that represent headteachers.

Training Reforms

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from head teachers regarding the timetable for the introduction of the National Grid for Learning and the Government's post-16 education and training reforms between April and September 2000; and if he will make a statement. [98282]

Mr. Wills: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff are employed within his Department in the *(a)* schools, *(b)* finance and analytical services, *(c)* personnel and support services, *(d)* strategy and communications, *(e)* further and higher education and youth training, *(f)* employment, lifelong learning and international and *(g)* operational directorates; and what the current year's budget is for each directorate. [98276]

Mr. Wills: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Standards and Effectiveness Unit

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the research projects related to raising standards in schools which have been commissioned by his Standards and Effectiveness Unit since May 1997. [98285]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following research projects relating to raising standards have been commissioned directly by the Standards and Effectiveness Unit:

1. The Impact of School Transfers and Transitions on Pupil Progress and Attainment
2. Evaluation of the Initial Effects and Implementation of 'Success for All' in Nottingham
3. Causing Concern but Improving: A Review of Schools' Experiences
4. Innovative Grouping Practices in Secondary Schools
5. Evaluation of Pilot Beacon Schools
6. Pupil Mobility in Schools
7. A Review and Evaluation of Approaches for Developing Pupils' Thinking
8. Effective Action Planning after Inspection
9. Excellence in Research on Schools
10. The Impact of Adult/Child Ratios on Standards
11. An Overview of Evaluation of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies
12. Evaluation of Pilot Education Action Zones
13. Research Centre on Economics of Education
14. Developing a Collaborative Research Unit in Education for Evidence Informed Policy and Practice.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff were employed in the Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the end of September 1999; and what the budget of the Unit is in the current year. [98297]

Ms Estelle Morris: At the end of September 1999 the number of staff in the Unit was 204. The running cost budget for the Unit in the current year is £5.9 million.

Action Zones

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is the total amount of matched funding which has been pledged by business in the first year of the operation of Round Two Education Action Zones; and what proportion of that funding will be in cash; [98284]

(2) how much of the £18 million of sponsorship for the Education Action Zone initiative which was announced on 8 November has been *(a)* in kind and *(b)* in cash. [98283]

Ms Estelle Morris: Over £6 million for Round one and £12 million for Round two Education Action Zones has been pledged for their first year of operations. The respective shares of cash and in kind have yet to be precisely confirmed. This and other relevant financial information will be available as part of the annual audited accounts for each zone.

National Educational Research Forum

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the members, budget and terms of reference of the National Educational Research Forum. [98286]

Mr. Wicks: There are nineteen members of the National Educational Research Forum. They are:

Professor Sir Michael Peckham, Director, School of Public Policy (Chair)

Professor Richard Daugherty, University of Aberystwyth, Wales

Professor Alan Dyson, University of Newcastle

Professor David Hargreaves, University of Cambridge

Professor Jean Rudduck, Homerton College

Ms Lesley Saunders, National Foundation for Educational Research

Mr. Paul Lincoln, Director of Education Essex LEA

Ms Parin Bahl, Assistant Director of Education Newham LEA

Ms Pat Reynolds, Headteacher Rushden Secondary School Northants and Chair TTA teacher research panel

Ms Penny Brown Headteacher West Down Primary School Devon

Ms Rhondda Gateway, Hackney Community College London

Ms Carol Adams, Chief Executive General Teaching Council

Professor Charles Desforges, Director ESRC Teaching and Learning Initiative

Professor Sir Brian Fender, Chief Executive Higher Education Funding Council

Ms Meryl Thompson, Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Dr. Helen Quigley, Assistant Director Nuffield Foundation

Ms Anne Diack, BBC/OU Production Centre

Dr. Christopher Grey, Judge Institute of Management Studies

Mr. Michael Bichard, Permanent Secretary, DfEE.

The budget for the forum is £50,000 per year.

The terms of reference have not yet been agreed and finalised by the group.

LEA Support Unit

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in which directorate of his Department the LEA Support Unit is located; how many staff were employed in that unit at the end of September; and what the budget of the unit is in the current year. [98298]

Ms Estelle Morris: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Private Office Staff

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff are employed in his Private Office; how many of those staff are political appointees; and what the current year's budget is for the Private Office. [98296]

Mr. Wills: The number of full time equivalent staff currently employed in the Private Office, working directly to the eight Ministers in the Department, is 47. This includes three full time equivalent special advisers.

The current year's budget for the Private Office is £2.2 million (excluding Ministers salaries).

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of local education authorities spend *(a)* below, *(b)* at and *(c)* above their standard spending assessments. [98367]

Ms Estelle Morris: In 1999–2000 the budgeted net recurrent expenditure of 35 per cent. of local education authorities in England was below their standard spending assessment while that for 65 per cent. was above it.

Source:

DETR RA return.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of total spending on education is retained by each local education authority for the purpose of central administration. [98361]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows, for local education authorities in England for 1999–2000, the planned central administration expenditure as a percentage of the total education spend.

Central administration as percentage of total education budget

	Percentage
City of London	16.5
Camden	2.5
Greenwich	3.5
Hackney	1.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	1.9
Islington	2.8
Kensington and Chelsea	3.2
Lambeth	1.6
Lewisham	2.6
Southwark	2.4
Tower Hamlets	2.4
Wandsworth	1.9
Westminster	0.9
Barking/Dagenham	1.6
Barnet	2.4
Bexley	2.4
Brent	1.8
Bromley	2.3
Croydon	1.8
Ealing	1.4
Enfield	1.1
Haringey	2.8
Harrow	2.4
Havering	1.8
Hillingdon	1.4
Hounslow	2.5
Kingston	1.8
Merton	3.3
Newham	1.6
Redbridge	2.8
Richmond	2.2
Sutton	2.3
Waltham Forest	2.4
Birmingham	2.0
Coventry	1.8
Dudley	2.5
Sandwell	1.8
Solihull	1.8
Walsall	1.2
Wolverhampton	1.8
Knowsley	2.3
Liverpool	2.2
St. Helens	2.1
Sefton	1.3
Wirral	2.1
Bolton	1.3
Bury	2.7

Central administration as percentage of total education budget

	Percentage
Manchester	3.9
Oldham	1.2
Rochdale	1.7
Salford	2.3
Stockport	1.2
Tameside	1.9
Trafford	1.5
Wigan	1.7
Barnsley	0.8
Doncaster	1.4
Rotherham	1.5
Sheffield	1.3
Bradford	1.1
Calderdale	2.0
Kirklees	1.6
Leeds	1.6
Wakefield	1.4
Gateshead	2.0
Newcastle	1.9
North Tyneside	1.5
South Tyneside	2.0
Sunderland	1.8
Isles of Scilly	6.3
Bath and North East Somerset	1.4
Bristol	2.2
North Somerset	1.8
South Gloucestershire	2.3
Hartlepool	2.6
Middlesbrough	3.1
Redcar and Cleveland	3.7
Stockton on Tees	1.7
Hull	1.6
East Riding	1.8
North East Lincolnshire	1.9
North Lincolnshire	2.1
North Yorkshire	1.3
York	2.2
Bedfordshire	1.4
Luton	1.8
Buckinghamshire	1.6
Milton Keynes	1.1
Derbyshire	1.4
Derby City	1.6
Dorset	2.0
Poole	1.6
Bournemouth	2.5
Durham	1.3
Darlington	1.1
East Sussex	2.6
Brighton and Hove	2.5
Hampshire	1.5
Portsmouth	1.9
Southampton	1.9
Leicestershire	2.2
Leicester City	1.3
Rutland	2.0
Staffordshire	1.4
Stoke-on-Trent	2.1
Wiltshire	2.0
Swindon	2.6
Bracknell Forest	3.2
Windsor and Maidenhead	1.8
West Berkshire	1.8
Reading	2.3
Slough	2.1
Wokingham	2.5
Cambridgeshire	1.5
Peterborough	1.8
Cheshire	1.2
Halton	2.2
Warrington	1.2
Devon	2.1
Plymouth	1.6

Central administration as percentage of total education budget

	Percentage
Torbay	2.5
Essex	1.2
Southend-on-Sea	1.2
Thurrock	2.3
Herefordshire	2.7
Worcestershire	1.5
Kent	1.8
Medway Towns	1.8
Lancashire	1.1
Blackburn with Darwen	2.8
Blackpool	1.6
Nottinghamshire	1.5
Nottingham City	1.6
Shropshire	1.1
Telford and Wrekin	1.4
Cornwall	1.2
Cumbria	1.3
Gloucestershire	1.4
Hertfordshire	1.0
Isle of Wight	1.7
Lincolnshire	0.9
Norfolk	1.2
Northamptonshire	1.4
Northumberland	1.9
Oxfordshire	0.7
Somerset	0.8
Suffolk	1.3
Surrey	1.8
Warwickshire	1.2
West Sussex	1.9

Redundancies

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance is provided to former grant maintained schools which make staff redundant on changing to foundation school status. [98366]

Ms Estelle Morris: The costs of making teachers redundant must be met by the local education authority, except in so far as an authority has good reason to deduct some or all of the cost from the school's budget share.

Bilateral Concordat

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will be publishing the bilateral concordat between his Department and the Scottish Executive. [98410]

Mr. Blunkett: I have now concluded the concordat with my counterparts in the Scottish Executive. I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Service Development Fund

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what sums have been allocated to the Service Development Fund for *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 indicating those allocations and expenditures made from the Service Development Fund to date. [98250]

Mr. Blunkett: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Expenditure Statistics

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the *(a)* planned and

(b) actual education expenditure by *(a)* central and *(b)* local government for 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99, indicating the change for each year compared with the previous year in (i) cash and (ii) real terms. [98335]

Mr. Blunkett: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Spending Review

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the decision to class student loans as Government assets was taken into account when the total additional educational expenditure announced under the Comprehensive Spending Review (Cm. 4011) was calculated. [98336]

Mr. Blunkett: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what *(a)* amount and *(b)* percentage of the extra money for education announced under the Comprehensive Spending Review (Cm. 4011) is to be expended (i) through the Standards Fund, (ii) through education standard spending assessments and (iii) otherwise. [98251]

Ms Estelle Morris: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the announcements of additional expenditure on education made between May 1997 and the publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review (Cm. 4011), stating the date of the announcement and the amount announced in each case. [98253]

Mr. Blunkett: In July 1997 the Chancellor announced an additional £1.3 billion for schools in the UK (£1.1 billion for England) over the life of the Parliament, financed by the Windfall Tax, to start tackling the backlog of repairs to school buildings. At the same time, he announced that in 1998–99 an extra £1 billion would be available UK-wide for local authority current spending on schools (£835 million in England). In March 1998, he announced a further £200 million for education in England in 1998–99, of which £10 million was for Education Action Zones; £90 million for capital spending in schools to reduce infant class sizes, eliminate outside toilets and improve heating systems; £90 million to improve skills and £10 million for the University for Industry.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much of the extra money for education announced under the Comprehensive Spending Review (Cm. 4011) has been *(a)* allocated to and *(b)* spent on (i) employment and (ii) Welfare to Work programmes, for each relevant financial year. [98246]

Mr. Blunkett: None of the extra money announced for education under the Comprehensive Spending Review has been allocated to, or spent on, employment. Of the Department's total budget the following sums have been allocated to employment and Welfare to Work programmes:

£ million

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Employment	1,028	1,026	1,022
Welfare to Work[1]	86	86	86

[1] The majority of the Welfare to Work programmes are funded from the Windfall Tax levy. The Comprehensive Spending Review settlement did not include Windfall Tax levy allocations.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the announcements of extra expenditure on education since July 1998 not included in the additional money announced under the Comprehensive Spending Review (Cm. 4011), giving the dates of those announcements and amounts announced in each case. [98252]

Mr. Blunkett: The March 1999 Budget provided £400 million for England from the Capital Modernisation Fund for a network of learning centres aimed at improving standards and access to IT; £230 million across the UK from the National Lottery's New Opportunities Fund to help teachers purchase IT equipment for use at home (England's share of this was £180 million, 80 per cent.) and £49 million for schools in England to spend on books.

The November 1999 Pre-Budget Report provided £100 million PFI credits for schools; and £50 million from the windfall levy for the New Deal for Schools to repair and replace school buildings (of which England's share was £43 million).

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much of the extra money for education announced under the Comprehensive Spending Review (Cm. 4011) included *(a)* matched funding for standards fund and other centrally-managed projects contributed by local authorities and *(b)* permission to local authorities and others to increase their borrowings. [98245]

Ms Estelle Morris: Plans for the standards fund and capital allocations for 2000–01 and 2001–02 have not been finalised, so it is not possible to give a full answer to the question. In 1999–2000, English local authorities matched funding contributions to the Standards Fund were £120m higher than in 1998–99; Education Standard Spending Assessments in 1999–2000 rose by £1,100m. Credit approvals for education capital expenditure in England increased by £77m in the same period. The costs of this additional borrowing are supported through the capital financing standard spending assessment (CFSSA); the increases in CFSSA do not form part of the £19 billion.

Education Initiatives (Funding)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 28 June 1999, *Official Report*, columns *56–58*, concerning education initiatives launched since May 1997, how much of each initiative's budget was *(a)* spent centrally and *(b)* distributed in grants in financial years (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99. [98327]

Mr. Blunkett: The programmes listed in my right hon. Friend's response of 28 June are all specific grants distributed by my Department. None of these funds were spent centrally.

Socially Excluded Young People

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements he will make to ensure that personal advisers to socially excluded young people are *(a)* suitably qualified, *(b)* monitored in their activities and *(c)* offered a career structure. [94749]

Ms Jowell: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98208]

Mr. Wills: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98222]

Mr. Wills: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Class Sizes

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answers of 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, column *185*, and 29 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *1009*, concerning class sizes, when he now plans to write to the hon. Member for Hertsmere. [98237]

Ms Estelle Morris: I replied to the hon. Member, as promised, on 4 November. Copies of my letter have also been placed in the Library.

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures he is taking to reduce class sizes in Northampton South. [98321]

Ms Estelle Morris: Our pledge is to reduce all infant class sizes to 30 or below by September 2001 at the latest. The number of children in large infant classes in Northamptonshire Local Education Authority has already been reduced from 5,773 in January 1998 to 2,749 in September 1999, reflecting a national fall from 485,000 to 181,000 over the same period. Northamptonshire LEA's approved Infant Class Size Plan will reduce infant class sizes to 30 or less in virtually all schools by September 2000. We have already provided revenue funding amounting to £363,000 for 24 teachers and capital funding of £1.25 million for 15 new classrooms to enable Northamptonshire to carry out its plan. We will shortly agree further funding so that the Authority can implement in full next year.

New Deal (North-west)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have benefited from the New Deals in *(a)* the north-west and *(b)* Lancashire. [97612]

Ms Jowell: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

New Deal Gateway

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people who have been in local authority care have completed the New Deal Gateway and left for *(a)* unsubsidised employment, *(b)* subsidised employment, *(c)* education or training, *(d)* an environmental task force, *(e)* the voluntary sector, *(f)* other benefits, *(g)* other known destinations and *(h)* unknown destinations. [97303]

Ms Jowell: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people who have been in local authority care have entered the New Deal; and what proportion this represents of care leavers aged 18 to 24 years who are unemployed. [97305]

Ms Jowell: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

IT Projects

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the information technology projects undertaken by his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies, including the *(a)* start date, *(b)* planned completion date, *(c)* expected completion date, *(d)* planned cost and *(e)* estimated cost; and if he will make a statement. [98021]

Mr. Wills: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

EU Directive (Armed Forces)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps the Government have taken to implement EU Directive 94/33/EC on the protection of young people at work in relation to the safety of the working conditions of personnel under the age of 18 years in the armed services. [96589]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

WALES

Financial Allocations

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons an extra £35 million was allocated to his Department in addition to the block grant during the financial year 1998–99. [98020]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The £35 million was allocated to the Welsh Office as a call on the Reserve in 1998–99, to meet inescapable expenditure in that year.

Public Sector Employment

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the work force in Wales was employed in the public sector at the latest available date. [98041]

Mr. Paul Murphy: According to the Summer 1999 Labour Force Survey, between June and August 1999 an estimated 27 per cent. of people in employment in Wales were working in the public sector.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales concerning how funding approved under Objective 1 criteria is to be spent. [98193]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The content of the plan setting out the strategic priorities for use of Objective 1 funding in West Wales and the Valleys is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Structural Funds partnership. The exact nature of schemes to be approved for funding will depend on projects which come forward from sponsors within the priorities set out in the plan once approved by the European Commission. However, I take a keen interest in seeking to ensure that a wide range of good quality projects come forward from a range of partners and have discussed this with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales and other interested parties.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding obtaining matched funding for Objective 1 funding; and what assessment he has made of the sources this funding will come from. [98194]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The First Secretary and I meet frequently and discuss a range of issues, including Objective 1. There are many potential sources of match funding, both private and public sector, but it is a matter for regional partners and project sponsors to identify match funding for projects.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98232]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department's approach to waste management is based on the three "R"s, with "Recovery" (i.e. recycling, composting and energy recovery) following "Reduce" and "Re-use" as the preferred options for reducing waste sent to landfill. This should help us to achieve the Green Ministers' target for Government Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting, in 2000–01, as published in "Greening Government: First Annual Report of the Green Ministers Committee 1998–99".

My Department has a staff of 34 and a correspondingly small production of waste. We have, therefore, set no individual targets for paper, cardboard, glass, metal, plastic and other materials, and we do not keep formal records of waste recycled. We recycle paper as a matter of routine.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98198]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This Department uses two cars from the Government Car Service which are both fuelled by petrol.

It is the policy of the Government Car Service to offer models fuelled by liquid petroleum gas when cars are due for renewal, and this matter will be considered then.

SCOTLAND

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the expenditure per head on health services in Scotland for the current financial year and each of the two previous financial years. [97966]

Dr. Reid: Planned net expenditure on the National Health Service in Scotland in 1999–2000 was £964 per head. Actual expenditure per head in 1997–98 and 1998–99 was £850 and £901 respectively. Responsibility for the National Health Service in Scotland is now a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the expenditure per head for each Scottish health board area estimated for the current financial year and for each of the previous two financial years. [97965]

Dr. Reid: The identifiable net cash expenditure per head of population for each Health Board in 1997–98 and

1998–99 and the planned expenditure for 1999–2000 is set out in the table.

	[1]1997–98	[1]1998–99	[2]1999–2000
Argyll and Clyde	818	861	872
Ayrshire and Arran	817	858	880
Borders	824	876	892
Dumfries and Galloway	833	877	911
Fife	810	866	869
Forth Valley	843	889	899
Grampian	859	914	922
Greater Glasgow	859	885	910
Highland	855	893	896
Lankarkshire	818	865	887
Lothian	889	911	922
Orkney	975	1,082	961
Shetland	979	1,013	1,022
Tayside	886	939	945
Western Isles	970	1,024	986

[1] Outturn
[2] Plan

The figures do not take account of the cost of services provided on a national basis nor is it possible to differentiate between expenditure on a Health Board's own resident population and expenditure on some services provided to other Health Boards' residents. Health Board areas' weighted population figures have been used in the above calculations. The figures for 1999–2000 are not directly comparable with the earlier years because some services, such as ambulances, which were included in Health Boards' allocations in 1997–98 and 1998–99 are being met centrally in 1999–2000. Similarly the 1999–2000 figures do not take account of allocations, such as end year flexibility, which have still to be notified to Health Boards. The above figures are on a cash basis and therefore the year on year comparisons may also be distorted by capital expenditure. Responsibility for the National Health Service in Scotland is now a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98200]

Dr. Reid: My Department leases 2 vehicles from the Government Car Service.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98228]

Dr. Reid: My Department's approach to waste management is based on the three "R"s: with "Recovery" (ie. recycling, composting and energy recovery) following "Reduce" and "Re-use" as the preferred options for reducing waste sent to landfill. This should help us to achieve the Green Ministers' target for Government Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting, in 2000–01, as published in "Greening Government; First Annual Report of the Green Ministers Committee 1998–99".

TREASURY

PSBR

15. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Treasury's estimate of the public sector borrowing requirement or surplus for *(a)* April 2000, *(b)* September 2000, *(c)* April 2001, *(d)* September 2001 and *(e)* April 2002. [97004]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Pre-Budget Report includes annual forecasts of the surplus on current budget and public sector net borrowing. The Government do not publish monthly forecasts of these.

ISAs and PEPs

16. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new savers have been created by the creation of ISAs. [97005]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Inland Revenue does not yet have detailed information about individuals tax free savings patterns. As my predecessor told the hon. Gentleman on 8 July, this information will be available once the Inland Revenue have analysed provider's annual returns after ISAs have been running for a full year.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total value of *(a)* ISAs sold in the period April to September and *(b)* PEPs sold in the same months in 1998. [97862]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* Aggregate figures for the total amount subscribed to ISAs up to 5 October 1999 are not yet available.

Scotland

17. **Ms Osborne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of the impact of his economic policies in Scotland. [97006]

Mr. Gordon Brown: In Scotland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, we have created a sound and credible platform for stability that will help us attain our objective of high and stable levels of growth and employment.

29. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of his Department's policies on the levels of employment and unemployment in Scotland. [97018]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Present policies are designed to achieve high and stable levels of growth and employment through promoting employment opportunities for all—in Scotland as well as the UK. Since the election, Scottish unemployment has fallen by 36,000 and Scottish employment has risen by 20,000, both in line with UK trends.

Exports

18. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the change in price competitiveness of British exports since May 1997. [97007]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There is strong evidence that exporters are coping well with the continued high level of sterling. Export volumes rose strongly over the summer to their highest ever level, and latest surveys show manufacturing output in October growing for the seventh consecutive month.

Tax Burden

19. **Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the national tax burden. [97008]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have had a number of representations on this issue.

22. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate the difference between the tax burden in 1996–97 and his projection for the tax burden in 2001–02 on the basis that income tax credits are accounted for as expenditure rather than as negative taxation. [97011]

Dawn Primarolo: Total income tax credits in 1996–97 were 3 per cent. of GDP as compared to the Pre-Budget Report projection of 0.7 per cent. of GDP in 2001–02. New tax credits will be paid by the Inland Revenue through pay packets as income tax credits and will be regarded as such by families that receive them.

Working Families Tax Credit

20. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the contribution Working Families Tax Credit is making to the alleviation of poverty in Liverpool, Riverside. [97009]

Mr. Timms: The Working Families Tax Credit tackles poverty by boosting the incomes of 1.5 million working families including the constituents of my hon. Friend, who will receive on average £24 a week more than they would have with Family Credit. The Working Families Tax Credit makes work pay and will increase employment opportunities.

31. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many inquiries have been received by the Working Families Tax Credit response line from Wales. [97020]

Dawn Primarolo: Up to midnight on 2 November, there were just under 24,000 calls to the Working Families Tax Credit response line from callers with a Welsh post code.

32. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact the working families tax credit will have in increasing the financial incentives for women to work. [97021]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Working Families Tax Credit makes work pay and will improve incentives for all working families. The childcare tax credit which provides up to £105 per week towards childcare costs, will be of particular help to women who want to work.

36. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of children in Wythenshawe and Sale, East who will be removed from poverty as result of the Working Families Tax Credit. [97025]

Dawn Primarolo: The measures announced by the Chancellor in his last budget, including WFTC, will together lift one and a quarter million people out of poverty—800,000 of them children. There is, however, no estimate available for Wythenshawe and Sale, East.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he will take to ensure that recipients of working families tax credit are able to make provision for a retirement pension. [98030]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* Most recipients of working families tax credit pay national insurance contributions towards entitlement for retirement pension. For those who do not, pension entitlement is safeguarded by the automatic award of national insurance credits for each week of receipt of working families tax credit.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many calls have been received by the Working Families Tax Credit Hotline since its inception *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Yorkshire and the Humberside Region. [98031]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* Up to midnight last night, the telephone response line had handled just over 700,000 calls nationally. In the Tyne & Yorkshire TV region the response line had handled just over 80,000 calls.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many new claims for Working Families Tax Credit were granted during October; how many new claims there were for family credit in each of the previous 12 months; and how many six-monthly renewals of entitlement have occurred in each of the previous 13 months; [98292]

(2) how many calls about Working Families Tax Credit have been received at the Inquiry Line; and how many have led to a claim being granted. [98295]

Dawn Primarolo: I shall write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many phone calls have been made to the freephone number for information about the Working Families Tax Credit *(a)* in total and *(b)* from Wales. [98405]

Dawn Primarolo: Up to midnight last night, the telephone response line had handled just over 700,000 calls nationally. We estimate that there were around 27,000 calls from callers with a Welsh post code.

Bank of England Independence

21. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his policy of independence of the Bank of England. [97010]

Mr. Andrew Smith: A wide range of people and international organisations, such as the IMF and OECD, have welcomed the Chancellor's decision to grant the

Bank of England operational independence to set interest rates to meet the Government's inflation target. In a recent report the Treasury Committee said:

"The Chancellor's decision to transfer day to day control of monetary policy to a politically independent Bank of England has been vindicated so far in the transparency and technical quality of the process of decision making."

The public can be confident that low inflation will be delivered in practice. This is the most important contribution monetary policy can make to achieving the Government's objective of high and stable levels of growth and employment.

28. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of his policy of granting operational independence over monetary policy to the Bank of England. [97017]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A Treasury paper "the New Monetary Policy Framework", published on 19 October, concluded that the Monetary Policy Committee's record so far in meeting the Government's inflation target was a good one. Inflation has stayed close to the Government's target and is expected to remain so; interest rates peaked at half the level recorded in the previous cycle; and despite global instability last year, the UK avoided a repeat of the boom and bust seen so often in the past. The success of the new framework has also been recognised by international bodies such as the IMF and OECD.

Motoring Taxes

23. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on *(a)* vehicle excise duty and *(b)* fuel duties. [97012]

Mr. Timms: The Pre-Budget Report document published on 9 November provides the latest explanation of policy on vehicle excise fuel duties.

East Midlands

24. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for encouraging greater economic growth in the East Midlands. [97013]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since the election we have been putting in place a new framework of stability, employability, productivity and responsibility to deliver the Government's objectives of high and stable levels of growth and employment. This framework offers the best prospect of increased prosperity for all—both in the East Midlands and the rest of the UK.

The East Midlands Development Agency, which became operational from 1 April this year, will help to further economic development and regeneration in the East Midlands. In promoting employment, business efficiency, investment and competitiveness, the agency will work with business and the wider community towards the Government's aim of sustained economic prosperity.

HIP Countries

25. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of whether the International Monetary Fund has adequate resources for the enhanced heavily indebted poor countries initiative. [97014]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The IMF/World Bank Annual Meetings in Washington in September reached agreement on all the elements of a financing package that will enable the Fund to make its full contribution to the HIPC Initiative.

Climate Change Levy

26. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the proposed climate change levy. [97015]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received a number of representations on the climate change levy. The views expressed fed in to the further details on the design of the levy announced by the Chancellor in his Pre-Budget Report statement.

37. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on exemption from his proposed climate change levy. [97026]

Mr. Timms: The Government believe that all sectors of the economy must play their part in helping tackle the problem of climate change. So there will not be complete exemptions from the climate change levy for particular firms or sectors. In line with Lord Marshall's recommendation, the Government propose to retain an incentive for all firms to save energy at the margin. But the Government do recognise the special position of energy intensive industries and intends to offer an 80 per cent. discount to those energy intensive sectors that sign energy efficiency agreements which meet the Government's criteria.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what calculation he has made of the effects of different levels of climate change levy on enabling the UK to meet the targets for reduction in greenhouse gas emissions under the Kyoto protocol and the Government's domestic goal for reducing carbon dioxide emissions; [97722]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of the climate change levy assuming that all its costs are passed on to consumers; and if he will make a statement; [97623]

(3) what assessment he has made of the report by Business Strategies entitled "The Climate Change Levy—Impact on the UK Economy"; and if he will make a statement; [97625]

(4) what calculation he has made of the cost of collection and administration of the climate change levy for *(a)* the Government, *(b)* large companies and *(c)* small and medium sized enterprises; and if he will make a statement; [97855]

(5) what representations he has received from scientists and engineers about the effect of the climate change levy on *(a)* large companies and *(b)* small and medium sized enterprises; and if he will make a statement; [97840]

(6) if he will assess the effect the climate change levy will have on GDP, based on the assumption that industry will not be able to pass on the climate change levy to customers; and if he will make a statement; [97858]

(7) what assessment he has made of the effect the climate change levy will have on the balance of payments between the UK and the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement; [97859]

(8) if he will exempt companies which make reductions in their carbon dioxide emissions commensurate with the UK's national reduction targets agreed at Kyoto from the climate change levy; and if he will make a statement; [97861]

(9) what assessment he has made of the impact the climate change levy would have on future investment in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [97854]

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend's questions touch upon a number of issues surrounding the introduction of the climate change levy and I will write to him shortly to respond in full to the points raised. I will arrange for a copy of that letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the application of the Climate Change Levy to the horticultural industry. [98406]

Mr. Timms: The Government believe that all sectors of the economy must play their part in tackling climate change. The climate change levy is designed to be revenue neutral for the private sector as a whole, with all the revenues raised being fully recycled back to business through a cut in employers' National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and additional support for energy efficiency measures.

It is not possible to say what the exact impact of the levy on the horticultural sector will be. That will depend on a number of factors including, for example, their future energy consumption, what use they make of electricity generated from "new" renewable sources of energy and in "good quality" combined heat and power plants, and whether they take advantage of the proposed introduction of a system of enhanced capital allowances for energy saving investments. The horticulture sector will also benefit from the lower overall rates of the climate change levy announced by the Chancellor in his Pre-Budget Report statement.

Credit Unions

27. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assistance he offers to credit unions and similar organisations which provide help to those who cannot or choose not to borrow through more traditional means. [97016]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government support the credit union ethos of encouraging people to start to save. I plan to make an announcement shortly on a number of measures designed to help credit unions.

Personal Service Companies

30. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the taxation of personal service companies. [97019]

Dawn Primarolo: We believe that people will be able to use service companies if they wish, as long as they pay their fair share of tax and National Insurance Contributions.

Saving

33. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he has taken to encourage saving. [97022]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government's strategy is two-fold. Firstly, it is to ensure economic stability, including low and stable inflation. High and variable inflation, such as the UK experienced in the past, discourages saving. The Government has reformed the macroeconomic framework to build a sound and credible platform of stability: inflation is close to target and expected to remain so. This will encourage savings and investment.

Supporting this is the introduction of a variety of measures. These include tax free individual savings accounts (ISAs) for short term at-need savings; pensions, especially stakeholder pensions, for planning for retirement; improved transparency and value of savings products, such as CAT standards for ISAs and pooled pensions investments (ppis); better regulation of the financial services industry through the Financial Services and Markets Bill; and raising consumer awareness, such as the Financial Services Authority's plans for comparative information on savings and investment products.

Taxation

34. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the extra tax payable since May 1997 as a result of his Budget measures. [97023]

Dawn Primarolo: Costings of the measures in the July 1997, March 1998 and March 1999 Budgets are given in tables 2.2, 1.3 and 1.3 of the respective Financial Statement and Budget Reports.

39. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the net change to the amount of tax payable in the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02 as a result of the three Budgets since July 1997. [97028]

Dawn Primarolo: Costings of the measures in the July 1997, March 1998 and March 1999 Budgets are given in tables 2.2, 1.3 and 1.3 of the respective Financial Statement and Budget Reports.

Pesticides Tax

35. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the proposed pesticides tax. [97024]

Mr. Timms: Ninety nine responses were received in the course of the consultation exercise on the design of a tax or charge scheme for pesticides. A summary of these was published on 9 November.

Fuel Duty Escalator

38. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of the fuel duty escalator. [97027]

Mr. Timms: The Government's policy on the fuel duty escalator is set out on page 121 of the 1999 Financial Statement & Budget Report.

European Central Bank

40. **Mr. John Cryer:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the mechanisms of public accountability of the European Central Bank. [97029]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The EC Treaty contains several provisions designed to ensure the accountability of the European Central Bank. In accordance with Article 113(3) of the Treaty, the ECB is required to submit an annual report on the activities of the European System of Central Banks, and on the monetary policy of both the previous and current year to the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the European Council. The President of the ECB is required to present the report to the Council and to the European Parliament which may hold a general debate on that basis. In addition, the President of the ECB and the other members of the ECB's Executive Board may, at the request of the European Parliament or on their own initiative, be heard by the committees of the European Parliament.

"Building Trust in Statistics"

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost to public funds of printing and publishing Building Trust in Statistics (Cm 4412). [98040]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Denzil Davies, dated 11 November 1999:

As the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the total cost to public funds of printing and publishing *Building Trust in Statistics* (CM. 4412).

The cost to the ONS for printing and publishing *Building Trust in Statistics* was £2,059. All other printing costs fall entirely to The Stationery Office, the private sector publishers.

Import Duties

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many category-lines of duty there are on imported goods and services under the Integrated Tariff of the United Kingdom. [98162]

Dawn Primarolo: There are 15,600 commodity lines within the Integrated Tariff. Identifying how many carry positive rates of duty would be disproportionately costly. Services are not covered by the Integrated Tariff.

Land Settlement Association

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received as to the fairness and legality of the tax treatment of former tenants of the Land Settlement Association in respect of the settlement of their litigation against the Ministry of Agriculture in 1991; and if he will make a statement. [98082]

Dawn Primarolo: Representations have been made querying the raising of tax charges by the Inland Revenue in respect of out of court compensation paid by MAFF to a number of former tenants of the Land Settlement Association. It has been explained that a compensation payment received for personal hardship is not liable to income tax, but a compensation payment received for the loss of trading profits is taxable as trading income, and that the nature of a compensation payment in an out of court settlement depends on the terms of the settlement read in the light of the pleadings.

It has also been made clear that Ministers do not intervene in individual cases. The Inland Revenue's independence from Treasury Ministers in the handling of individuals' tax affairs must be scrupulously observed. Where disputes continue between taxpayers and the Revenue it is for the Appeal Commissioners and the Courts to determine how the law is to be applied.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the deficit and surplus of the National Insurance Fund in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [98059]

Dawn Primarolo: The available figures for Great Britain are provided in the table.

£ million

Year	*[1]Surplus/deficit*
1989–90	–62
1990–91	1,485
1991–92	–3,459
1992–93	–4,897
1993–94	1,112
1994–95	2,279
1995–96	1,008
1996–97	–98
1997–98	1,871
1998–99	2,565

[1] Excess of receipts over repayments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the loss to the National Insurance Fund in 2001–02 and 2002–03 from the reduction of employers' contributions resulting from the introduction of a levy on business use of energy in April 2001; and what proposals he has to compensate the Fund for that loss. [97618]

Mr. Timms: The Chancellor announced in the Pre-Budget Report that the employers' rate of National Insurance would be cut from 12.2 per cent. to 11.9 per cent. This change will reduce the level of the National Insurance Fund by around £1 billion in 2001–02 and in 2002–03. A Treasury Grant is used to ensure that the balances on the fund are maintained.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) of 29 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *1031*, by how much the National Insurance Fund balance at the end of each year from 1997–98 to 2001–02 inclusive exceeds the minimum level recommended by the Government Actuary. [97617]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for Great Britain are shown in the table.

£ million

	Fund balance[1]	*Minimum level*	*Excess*
1997–98	9,608	7,099	2,509
1998–99	12,173	7,429	4,744
1999–2000[2]	13,702	7,758	5,943

£ million

	Fund balance[1]	Minimum level	Excess
2000–01[2]	15,330	7,965	7,365
2001–02[2]	16,730	8,299	8,430

[1] At the end of the year
[2] The estimates for these years are based on the difference between forecasts of receipts and expenditure. Changes in these forecasts could have a substantial impact on the balance.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of the National Insurance Fund at *(a)* 31 March, *(b)* 30 September and *(c)* the latest date for which information is available. [97359]

Dawn Primarolo: The balance of the National Insurance Fund (NIF) in Great Britain is estimated to be £12,173 million at 31 March 1999, rising to £13,702 million at 31 March 2000. An estimate for the balance of the NIF at September 1999 would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Independent Financial Advisers

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many independent financial advisers have applied to the pass scheme for professional indemnity insurance and have not obtained such insurance. [98078]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Pension Advisers Support System (PASS) was set up by those life offices which use independent financial advisers (IFAs) to provide help to small IFAs in the conduct of the pensions review. It is a voluntary scheme designed to improve speed of delivery of the regulatory requirements to review cases of potential pensions mis-selling.

PASS now has 2,910 members who benefit from a range of services. PASS itself does not provide professional indemnity (PI) insurance but offers members access to a panel of brokers able to assist in securing cover, and a panel of solicitors able to provide confidential advice on legal PI issues.

The PIA requires its member firms to maintain PI cover of a specified standard. While the price of that insurance has risen for some firms in the recent past, it continues to be widely available. While PIA are aware that some IFAs have had problems in finding compliant PI cover, IFAs who follow PIA's standards and guidance should be able to obtain it.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many independent financial advisers have been prevented by the regulators from offering financial advice to the public, and for what reasons, since the start of phase 1 of the Pensions Mis-selling Review. [98077]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since 1 April 1995, when the Personal Investment Authority (PIA) issued guidelines to the industry on Phase 1 of the review, 261 Independent Financial Adviser (IFA) firms regulated by the PIA have had their authorisation revoked, and were therefore prevented from offering investment advice to the public. The PIA can revoke firms' authorisation for a wide variety of reasons. No detailed analysis is readily available of the grounds for revocation in the case of these firms.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has held with the Financial Services Authority on the subject of financial exclusion; and if he will make a statement. [98057]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Financial Services Authority was represented on the Policy Action Team which examined access to financial services, whose report will be published shortly.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 8 November; and if he will make a statement. [98156]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Paymaster General attended the Economic and Finance Council of Ministers in Brussels on 8 November.

There was a discussion of the proposed "tax package" (code of conduct on business taxation, taxation of savings and elimination of withholding taxes on cross order interest and royalty payments between companies). The United Kingdom position, set out in its paper on international bonds presented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the informal meeting of the Council in September, remains unchanged.

The Council agreed the detail of the funding package for HIPC (highly indebted poor countries) announced in Washington in September. A draft report on economic policy co-ordination was introduced by the chairman of the Economic and Finance Committee. This will be discussed again at the meeting on 29 November. A common statement on the introduction of euro notes and coins was agreed. The renewal of the European Investment Bank's mandate for lending to third countries was agreed, subject to a reservation by one member state. The Council took note of a Commission communication on risk capital and invited the Commission to prepare, for the Special European Council in Lisbon next March, a monitoring and benchmarking mechanism which would enable the Council to develop and implement the Risk capital Action Plan by identifying clear priorities and setting measurable objectives where appropriate. The chairman of the Economic Policy Committee (EPC) presented the joint opinions of the EPC and the Employment and Labour Market committee on the draft Guidelines for member states' employment policies for the year 2000 and on the draft Recommendations on the implementation of member states' employment policies. These will be discussed further at the joint ECOFIN/Social Affairs Council on 29 November.

Excise Duty

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated annual amount of tax forgone as a consequence of the cross channel trade in *(a)* alcoholic drinks and *(b)* tobacco products. [97544]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise's latest estimates of the amount of revenue lost (excise duty and VAT) through legitimate cross-border shopping in 1998

and cross-Channel smuggling in 1999 were published in the table 5.1 of the Pre-Budget Report, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Middle-income Earners

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to relieve the tax burden on middle-income earners, defined as those earning between £15,000 and £29,000 per year. [97926]

Dawn Primarolo: As the Chancellor announced in his last Budget, and reaffirmed in the Pre-Budget Report, the basic rate of income tax will be cut from 23p to 22p from April 2000.

Savings Tax

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the cost of extending the 10 pence starting rate of tax to savings. [96863]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Chancellor announced in the Pre-Budget report that the starting rate of tax would apply to savings from April 1999 with a cost of £110 million. This estimate is based on the 1997–98 Survey of Personal Incomes.

Environmental Trusts

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the rules governing the local environmental trusts created under the provisions of landfill tax legislation, *(b)* the method or format by which nominated trustees are to be selected and *(c)* the common core provisions that have to exist in any trust's constitution, in particular in relation to safeguarding the trust's work from the interests of the industries contributing to the trusts. [97401]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* The Landfill Tax Regulations 1996 contain the legislative framework within which the Landfill Tax Environmental Bodies Scheme operates. Regulation 33 lays down the conditions that an environmental body has to meet in order for contributions to it to qualify for tax credits under the scheme. Regulation 33(1) precludes an environmental body from applying any of its funds for the benefit of any contributing landfill operator, and specifies that, to be eligible for approval, a body must not be controlled by one or more local authorities.

ENTRUST, the regulator for the scheme, also publishes literature detailing its requirements of prospective environmental bodies. I have asked ENTRUST to send a copy to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the membership of the regulatory body overseeing the work of environmental trusts set up under the landfill tax legislation, indicating from where the members are drawn, the duration of their office and their terms of reference. [97402]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* I am arranging for the information asked for by my hon. Friend about ENTRUST, the regulator of the landfill tax environmental bodies credit scheme, to be placed in the Library of the House.

Labour-intensive Services (VAT)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has submitted to the European Commission for the lowering of zero rating of VAT on labour-intensive services delivered directly to the final consumer. [97391]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 5 November 1999]:* Zero rating would not be permitted under the experimental scheme as the new Directive provides only for reduced rates of not less than 5 per cent. Any change to VAT coverage would be for the Chancellor to decide in the next Budget.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the European Commission about Council Directive 1999/85/EC concerning reduced VAT rates on labour-intensive services. [98176]

Dawn Primarolo: The UK has made it clear to the Commission that any change to VAT rates and coverage would be for the Chancellor to decide in the next Budget.

Gold

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what form authority was given to the Governor of the Bank of England to sign the statement issued on 26 September by 15 European central banks entitled, Statement on Gold. [97392]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* By long-standing arrangement, the Bank acts as the Treasury's agent in managing the reserves. As is normal on such occasions the Treasury gave the Bank authority to act.

GDP (Health Spending)

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the proportion of GDP spent on the NHS in each year since 1970. [96185]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1999, *Official Report*, columns *403–04*, on special advisers, if he will give the cost incurred by Treasury special advisers, including travel and accommodation, for each individual occasion of official travel listed in the paper, Official Travel Overseas by Treasury Special Advisers 1997–99. [96968]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the former Economic Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) on 27 July. Details of official travel overseas by Treasury special advisers were placed in the Library of the House on that day. The cost of overseas travel by special advisers accompanying Treasury Ministers was included in the figures in the Prime Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on 17 June 1999, *Official Report*, columns *196–97*.

VAT (France)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rate of VAT applies to *(a)* building repairs and *(b)* energy-saving materials in France. [98138]

Dawn Primarolo: France applies a standard VAT rate of 20.6 per cent. to general building repairs and the purchase of energy saving materials. There is also a reduced VAT rate of 5.5 per cent. for the repair and renovation of housing, which would include the installation of energy saving materials where they are supplied as part of such a service.

Bookmakers

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of loss of revenue consequent upon bookmakers moving their business offshore. [98011]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* No such estimate is available.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Claytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98201]

Dawn Primarolo: The Treasury's cars are supplied by the Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA). Three of the six cars run on LPG. All new cars supplied under the GCDA contract will run on alternative fuels or will be fitted with the new technology "clean" engine which uses unleaded petrol. The contract to run the minibus, which connects our two London offices, will be renewed on 1 December and the minibus will run exclusively on low-sulphur diesel.

Office for National Statistics

The ONS uses a total of 11 cars within its Registration Inspectorate division. Of these, two are petrol and nine are diesel. There is no definite plan to convert the vehicles to liquid petroleum gas, but they are replaced every three years.

The ONS facilities management division has three diesel vans, of which one is now redundant. There are no plans for conversion as the FM services are in the process of being outsourced—this is scheduled for completion by July 2000.

HM Customs and Excise

The HMC&E have a Departmental fleet which comprises 1,894 vehicles. Obviously the number of vehicles on the fleet is subject to (minimal) daily change in that each Collection regularly dispose of, and subsequently replace, vehicles on a rolling basis. Please note that the Department has no solely liquid petroleum gas vehicles on its fleet.

The current breakdown of the fleet is given in the table.

Future Plans

A further three vehicles already on fleet are being converted for bi-fuel usage within the next two months. We have no definitive plans to convert existing petrol/diesel vehicles to bi-fuel function on a major scale. The Department is "trialling" the above number of vehicles to determine their viability in meeting both the business need and compliance in meeting "green" obligations. Furthermore, such factors as the infrastructure to ensure that such vehicles represent a realistic, user friendly alternative to petrol/diesel powered vehicles and also the question of residual values are being monitored before a large scale commitment can be given to utilising bi-fuel vehicles on a large scale

We will also be setting a target to reduce the Departmental vehicle fuel consumption by 10 per cent. in the coming year as part of the green initiative and to reduce costs.

We have recently completed a trial with an electric vehicle at Heathrow airport and will analyse the findings before deciding if this type of fuel propulsion is a viable option.

Inland Revenue

The Inland Revenue have submitted a response which includes the Valuation Office Agency, Contributions Agency, National Criminal Intelligence Agency (NCIS) and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA). Their statement on future plans for PLG conversions also covers the above agencies.

Future Plans

"Both the IR pool and Private User Scheme (PUS) fleet have purchased and are currently running one LPG vehicle, plus we have been trialling them as a long term demos at various locations. We are also assessing the viability of electric vehicles. We have no definite plans for the wholesale conversion of the fleet at present. We are also monitoring the residual values of alternative fuelled vehicles as an on-going exercise before any final decisions are concluded.

We are however down sizing the fleet in terms of the vehicle engine capacities quite substantially, ensuring that the vehicles being used by our offices and individuals meet the business requirement fully. Therefore offering better value for money and a cleaner environment."

The UK Debt Management Office, Government Actuary's Department, National Savings and Royal Mint have no vehicles of their own.

Departments and Agencies	*Petrol*	*Diesel*	*Petrol/LPG*	*Total*
HM Customs & Excise	1,117	777	17	1,894
Inland Revenue	607	800	2	1,407
Valuation Office	134	169	0	303
Contributions Agency	118	127	0	245
National Criminal Intelligence Service	135	14	0	149
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency	5	1	0	6
Royal Mint	[2]	[2]	[2]	[2]

Departments and Agencies	Petrol	Diesel	Petrol/LPG	Total
UK Debt Management Office	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Office for National Statistics	2	9	[2]—	11
HMT	[2]—	3	3	6
National Savings	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Government Actuary's Department	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	2,118	1,900	20	4,038

[1] This figure is included in the petrol figures (do not count twice)
[2] None

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98231]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Our Department's approach to waste management is to 'Reduce', 'Reuse' and 'Recover' (which includes recycling, composting and energy recovery) as the preferred options for reducing waste sent to landfill. This will help us to achieve the Green Ministers' target for Government Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste and to reduce the proportion of controlled waste going to landfill to 60 per cent. by 2005.

IR35

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings he has had with representatives of the Professional Contractors Group to discuss IR35. [98128]

Dawn Primarolo: I have spoken with a number of people during the course of the consultation period and have received many written representations.

Give as You Earn

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost to the Treasury of the Give as You Earn scheme since its inception; and if he will make a statement. [98000]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The cost of the tax relief under the Payroll Giving scheme since it was introduced in 1986 is £44 million, of which £7 million is the provisional cost in 1998–99. Annual costs are published in Inland Revenue Statistics.

Take-up of Payroll Giving has improved in recent years, with the annual level of donations increasing threefold in the 1990s (1990–91 to 1998–99). Donations in 1998–99 were up 11 per cent. on the previous year. Research undertaken by the Inland Revenue for the Government's review of charity taxation suggests that there is considerable potential to increase take-up further.

As a result of "Getting Britain Giving" measures announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Pre Budget Report, the Government is abolishing the £1,200 maximum limit for donations under Payroll Giving. In future, employees will be able to give as much as they like through their pay packet. In addition, charities and employers will be joining with the Inland Revenue in a campaign next summer to promote the scheme. The campaign will be backed by a time-limited supplement on Payroll Giving donations payable to charities for three years from April 2000, out of public expenditure.

Endowments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of tax payers in *(a)* the current tax year and *(b)* the 1998–99 tax year who have paid extra tax as a result of increasing their endowment payments in the last 10 years of their policy; and how much revenue is involved. [98334]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I regret that no estimates are available for 1998–99 or the current tax year.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenue projections he has made for the tax yield from taxable additional payments in the last 10 years of endowment policies. [98332]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

Departmental Accommodation

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it departmental practice where Government Departments are seeking to rent or lease property from companies registered overseas in *(a)* tax havens or *(b)* otherwise to require the landlords to provide lessees with information as to corporate structure, directors' names and United Kingdom shareholdings prior to entering into such rent or leasing arrangements. [98269]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Departmental accommodation policy is a matter for individual Departments.

Inland Revenue Staff

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *47*, if he will add an additional column to the Table indicating the numbers of staff at each grade transferred from the Department of Social Security to the Inland Revenue. [98349]

Dawn Primarolo: All the staff of the Contributions Agency transferred to the Inland Revenue on 1 April 1999, the numbers being as follows:

CA grade	Number	IR grade	Civil service grade
A1	2,484	E2	AA
A2	67	E1	AO
B1	2,867	E1	AO
B2	1,963	D	EO
B3	319	D	EO
C1	196	C2	HEO
C2	263	C2	HEO
C3	115	C1	SEO
D1	41	B	UG7
D2	2	B	UG7
D3	10	B	UG6
SCS	6	SCS	SCS
Total	8,333	—	—

Departmental Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many targets have been agreed between his Department and (i) local authorities and (ii) other bodies apart from his own agencies and non-departmental public bodies. [98318]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Departments have set out their key performance targets in Public Service Agreements (Cm 4181), and the measures of success they will use in the Output and Performance Analysis published by the Treasury on 31 March 1999.

The Treasury has agreed shared Public Service Agreement targets with the Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Social Security and Department for Education and Employment. They are listed in the Output and Performance Analysis.

Cash Planning Total

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the present public expenditure cash planning total for the year 2001–02 will remain unchanged when the Comprehensive Spending Review is rolled forward in 2000; and if he will make a statement. [98357]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Spending Review in 2000 will roll forward the spending plans agreed in the Comprehensive Spending Review for a further two years. The third year of the current plans (2001–02) will become the first year of the new planning period.

Public spending classified within the control regime as Annually Managed Expenditure continues to be planned and managed on an annual basis; the level of Annually Managed Expenditure for 2001–02, and hence of Total Managed Expenditure, will be reviewed again in 2000.

Windfall Tax

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 27 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *910*, (1) what the total value is of the Windfall Tax reserve in the current financial year; and what it was in financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99; [98324]

(2) if he will list the amounts of, and purposes for which, expenditure from the Windfall Tax reserve has been authorised to date; and whether such expenditure (i) may be authorised by the Department for Education and Employment alone or (ii) requires the prior agreement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. [98326]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Windfall Tax reserve and the allocation of the Windfall Tax receipts as currently estimated are outlined in Table 4.1 of the 1999 Pre Budget Report.

Expenditure from the Windfall Tax reserve is a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as chair of the Cabinet committee EA(WW).

Primary Teachers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many trained primary teachers are registered as unemployed. [97917]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Colin Pickthall, dated 11 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on trained primary teachers registered as unemployed.

In September 1999, there were 3,584 people claiming unemployment-related benefits in the United Kingdom whose usual occupation was in the primary and nursery education teaching profession. 4,058 claimants said they were seeking a job in that profession. Separate figures for primary and nursery education are not available. Nor is information available on the number of claimants who have actually trained as primary school teachers.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of deaths linked with hypothermia in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Wales, *(e)* Greater London and *(f)* Sutton and Cheam for each of the last five years for those aged (i) 60 to 64 years, (ii) 65 to 79 years, (iii) over 80 years and (iv) all ages. [98351]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 11 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking for the number of deaths linked with hypothermia.

Because of time constraints, figures are provided only for England and Wales.

These are given in the table.

Deaths where hypothermia was mentioned on the death certificate as the main or contributory cause of death, England & Wales, years of occurrence, 1994–1998

Year of death	*All ages*	*0–59*	*60–64*	*65–79*	*80+*
1994	345	49	10	100	186
1995	338	46	9	91	192
1996	414	51	7	112	244
1997	357	52	14	98	193
1998	352	54	14	102	182

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list excess winter mortality rates in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland, *(d)* Wales, *(e)* Greater London and *(f)* Sutton and Cheam for each of the last five years in terms of (i) numbers and (ii) percentages for those aged (1) 60 to 64 years, (2) 65 to 79 years, (3) over 80 years and (4) all ages. [98352]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 11 November 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking for excess winter mortality rates.

Because of time constraints, figures are only provided for England and Wales and are also only available for age-groups which are slightly different from those requested.

These are given in the table below.

Excess Winter Mortality by age, England and Wales, 1993–94 to 1997–98

Year	0–64	65–74	75–84	85+	Total
1993–4	2,116	4,164	9,291	10,330	25,900
1994–5	2,200	5,487	9,703	9,905	27,295
1995–6	2,900	7,073	14,367	15,855	40,194
1996–7	3,040	6,969	17,537	20,140	47,685
1997–8	1,698	4,203	7,869	9,130	22,899

Excess winter deaths are defined as the difference between the number of deaths during the four winter months (December to March) and the average number of deaths during the preceding autumn (August to November) and the following summer (April to July).

Customs and Excise (Millennium Hours)

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what hours Her Majesty's Customs and Excise will be working over the Christmas and New Year period 1999–2000; and if those hours differ from arrangements in previous years. [98045]

Dawn Primarolo: The Department expects to have staff on duty round the clock throughout the Christmas and Millennium holidays. The levels of staffing will be determined locally by managers who will judge the relative level of risk from smuggling or other forms of evasion. There is no reason to expect the levels of attendance at Christmas to be different from previous years except where changes to traffic or other local factors have led to changes of risk.

Special arrangements have been made for the Millennium holidays. Some 350–400 staff attendances will take place during the holidays to ensure IT and building systems are working correctly. For operational staff the numbers of staff on duty will be determined throughout the period by local managers again according to perceptions of risk and other needs. Managers will make these judgments taking into account the plans of shipping/airline companies to ensure that staffing levels are kept to the minimum necessary to meet the risk.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Heads of Information

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the changes of personnel holding posts within the Civil Service as departmental heads of information since 1 May 1997. [96338]

The Prime Minister: I will write to the hon. Member.

Research and Information Office

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what the anticipated annual running costs, including staff costs, are of the Research and Information Office within 10 Downing street; [96411]

(2) what is the job description of the head of the Research and Information Office within 10 Downing street. [96332]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* Bill Bush is employed as a Special Adviser to the Prime Minister under terms and conditions set out in the Model Contract for Special Advisers. Schedule 1 (part 1) of the Contract sets out the role and duties of Special Advisers. Bill Bush advises the Prime Minister on the operation and management of a single information resource at No. 10, the Research and Information Office (RIO), which provides briefing for the Prime Minister and No. 10 staff. A key part of the job is to advise on the use of the latest technology to enhance No. 10's Information Management Systems. The RIO is staffed by a mix of permanent civil servants and Special Advisers. The Private Secretary with responsibility for Parliamentary Affairs is the line manager for the permanent civil servants in the RIO. The anticipated annual running costs for the RIO, including staff costs, for 1999–2000 are £301,183.

Downing Street (Maintenance)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister how much has been spent on *(a)* maintaining, *(b)* decorating and *(c)* otherwise improving 10 Downing street since 1 May 1997; how much has been spent on wallpaper; and what plans exist for future spending. [97594]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* Maintaining, decorating and otherwise improving 10 Downing street is part of a continuing programme of work. No. 10, now as in the past, is maintained to standards appropriate to its status as a Grade 1 listed building, as laid down by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, in consultation with Westminster City Council and English Heritage as appropriate. The building also fulfils an important representational role.

Expenditure is recorded by financial years. No distinction is made between maintaining, decorating and otherwise improving the property as projects frequently cover two or more of these categories of work. Since 2 May 1997, the recorded expenditure by the Cabinet Office for No. 10 Downing street is:

1997–98: £188,000

1998–99: £348,000

April–October 1999: £435,000.

The expenditure is mainly attributable to the refurbishment of the state rooms and converting the top floor of the building into office accommodation. Approximately £1,200 has been spent on supplies of wallpaper.

Expenditure prior to 1997–98 is recorded in respect of the Nos. 10–12 Downing street complex as a whole and it is not possible to separately identify expenditure in respect of No. 10. On this basis recorded expenditure is as follows:

1995–96: £504,700

1996–97: £1,486,775.

Plans for future years' expenditure have yet to be agreed.

Rural Development (Ministry)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will create a ministry for rural development; and if he will make a statement. [97839]

The Prime Minister: I keep the machinery of Government regularly under review but have no plans to create a new ministry for rural development.

Balkans

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter of 8 November to the hon. Member for Linlithgow *(a)* what he has made of the number of refugees made homeless in (i) Kosovo before the ceasefire and (ii) Krajina, *(b)* what is his latest estimate of the number of mass murders in Kosovo, *(c)* what he has made of the effectiveness of sanctions in achieving democratic reform in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, *(d)* what support he has had from the International Committee of the Red Cross for sanctions against Serbia, *(e)* what requests he has received through international humanitarian organisations for exemptions from sanctions against Serbia and *(f)* if he will identify the western structures to which he is referring. [98273]

The Prime Minister: Although reliable figures are hard to establish, reports received from agencies on the ground, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), indicate that approximately 860,000 Kosovar Albanians were made homeless before the ceasefire. Reports also indicate that 330,000 Serb refugees left Krajina, 300,000 of whom are in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and 30,000 are in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Our estimate for the number of murders in Kosovo before KFOR entering remains at 10,000.

Sanctions are a recognised international tool for applying pressure to governments who are operating outside internationally accepted norms. This is one element of the economic and diplomatic pressure against the Milosevic regime which we hope will lead to democratic reform in Serbia. We and the European Union are working to ensure that the sanctions are properly aimed at the Milosevic regime, and not the ordinary people of Serbia. The EU visa ban and assets freeze against key members and supporters of the Milosevic regime are examples of this approach. At the same time we are working with the Serbian democratic opposition, for example on the "Energy for Democracy" Initiative.

The recent 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent called on the Security Council to take into account the needs of the civilian population and apply humanitarian exemptions as appropriate when applying sanctions. We and our EU partners are acting in full accordance with this approach, allowing exceptions to sanctions on humanitarian grounds.

Requests for humanitarian exemptions to the EU oil embargo have been made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and were approved. Exceptions have also been made for various Non-Governmental Organisations involved in de-mining, to allow their military equipment needed for de-mining to enter Kosovo, which remains part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and so is subject to the arms embargo.

"Integration into western structures" refers in particular to the promotion of increasingly closer relations with the EU and NATO.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the total cost including travel, accommodation and subsistence allowances, and the place visited on each occasion that Lance Price, Hilary Coffman, Kate Garvey, Fiona Millar, Sally Morgan and Anji Hunter travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997, whether accompanied by him or not. [94529]

The Prime Minister: Officials in my Office regularly accompany me on official overseas visits and I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on 17 June 1999, *Official Report*, columns *196–97*, which accounted fully for the costs of my official visits overseas during the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 1999, including the costs of those accompanying me. In addition, during the conflict in Kosovo Anji Hunter visited Macedonia and Albania and Hilary Coffman visited NATO Headquarters in Brussels and Romania at a total cost of £4,166. Anji Hunter also visited Chicago in April this year on official business; her travel costs were £3,936. Normal subsistence rates for civil servants have applied and all visits have been in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the visits made since May 1997 by Government Ministers to the Ukraine indicating the duration of each visit and its purpose. [98004]

The Prime Minister: There have been the following visits to the Ukraine by Ministers since May 1997:

Visitor	*Dates*	*Purpose*
Secretary of State for Defence	16–17 September 1997	Attend the UK-Polish-Ukranian exercise ("Cossack Steppe")
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development	23–26 November 1997	Consultations on the UK's technical assistance strategy for Ukraine
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development	11–12 May 1998	Attend European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Annual Meeting
Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Minister for Europe)	23–25 June 1998	Consultations on bilateral and multilateral issues
Secretary of State for Defence	17–18 June 1999	Consultations on bilateral defence co-operation, NATO and Kosovo

Select Committee Reports (Leaks)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what amendments have been made to the Ministerial Code in the past year in relation *(a)* to soliciting leaked drafts of

select committee reports and *(b)* to their use and retention if their receipt was unsolicited; and if he will make a statement; [98135]

(2) what instructions have been given to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants in relation to the handling of unsolicited leaked drafts of select committee reports. [98134]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on 28 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *953*.

National Farmers Union

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many meetings he has had since August with the President of the National Farmers Union; who else was present; and what was discussed; [98391]

(2) how many meetings have been held since August between Mr. Alistair Campbell and the President of the National Farmers Union; who else was present; and what was discussed. [98393]

The Prime Minister: I met the President of the National Farmers Union on 8 September 1999, when we discussed a number of issues concerning the farming industry. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Director General of the National Farmers Union also attended the meeting.

My Chief Press Secretary has not held a meeting with the President of the National Farmers Union.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hunting with Dogs

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans in respect of hunting with dogs. [R] [98388]

Mr. Straw: I am announcing today how the Government wish to proceed on this issue.

The Government's manifesto commitment was for a free vote on whether hunting with hounds should be banned. Such a free vote took place during proceedings in the 1997–98 Session on the Bill to outlaw hunting with dogs sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester. His Bill received a Second Reading by 411 votes to 151. I well understand the frustration of many hon. Members that no legislative conclusion followed.

I am, therefore, pleased to announce that the Government will offer reasonable time, if necessary, and drafting assistance for this issue to be considered by the House of Commons through a Private Member's Bill on a free vote. We shall consult the House authorities, as appropriate, on how this can best be taken forward.

The Government have decided that there should first be an inquiry. This will be a committee of inquiry not into whether hunting is right or wrong, which is a matter for Parliament to decide. Instead, the inquiry will be put in place better to inform the debate.

The inquiry will look at the practical issues involved in hunting with dogs, how a ban could be implemented and what the consequences of a ban would be. It will provide an opportunity for the facts about hunting properly to be considered.

Also, it will enable an examination of the effect on the rural economy, agriculture and pest control, the social and cultural life of particular areas of countryside, the management and conservation of wildlife and animal welfare of hunting and if hunting were to be banned. The inquiry will take evidence from all interested parties.

The inquiry will be chaired by the noble Lords, Lord Burns. It will be asked to report by late spring next year. The names of the other members of the inquiry will be announced as soon as possible. The report will be put before Parliament.

Once the inquiry has reported, the Government's offer of time and drafting assistance will take effect.

Copies of this reply have been placed in the Library and Vote Office.

Radio Communications

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total estimated cost of the Public Safety Radio Communications Project; and how much of this the Government are going to fund. [96404]

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with police authorities and chief constables regarding the allocation of funding for the Public Safety Radio Communications Project; and what estimate he has made of the project's cost in each of the police force areas in England and Wales. [97233]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, and I have frequent discussions with police authority representatives and chief constables about police resources, including funding for the Public Safety Radio Communications Project (PSRCP). In addition my officials and I have had discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities about the funding of PSRCP.

The Public Safety Radio Communications Project (PSRCP) is still in detailed negotiations on price and contract provision. Therefore, figures could change as contract negotiations are finalised, and so there are commercial sensitivities that limit the amount of detailed information I can provide.

Since 1995 the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) has used an indicative figure of £1.5 billion in estimated costs of this project. This figure was intended to be a guide to be revised after the intense two years' study, which has now concluded, to provide firm estimates of price and service quality.

The total cost for the service charge for the Public Safety Radio Communications Service (PSRCS) over the life of the service (15 years for each force) is likely, in today's money value, to be between £1.25 and £1.45 billion, excluding inflation and using standard Treasury accounting techniques. This is equivalent to £2.3 billion in cash terms if the Treasury 6 per cent. discount rate is not applied to the annual cash flows.

Approximately 80 per cent. of this cost goes to the core service which is to be funded centrally by means of a deduction from total police grant provision. The cost of services additional to the core, which all forces will purchase according to their own requirements, accounts for the remaining 20 per cent. These are net present costs (NPC) calculated employing a standard discounted cash flow technique for a base year of 1999 and using the Treasury's 6 per cent. discount rate.

Separately from the PSRCS charge, forces will need to purchase control room and radio terminal equipment. Based upon our understanding of the police service's overall requirement, we estimate the initial purchase and subsequent replacement costs for terminals to be around £300 million in NPC terms over the PSRCS service contract life. The need to replace terminals is ongoing and expenditure is currently being incurred as forces maintain their existing self-owned systems.

I announced recently that we are providing an extra £50 million of new money for the PSRCP. PITO the non departmental public body managing the PSRCP, has yet to decide, in consultation with the potential PSRCS service provider, BT, how best to use this money to reduce the cost of the service. The Government's intention is for it to be used in a way which reduces the charge in the third and subsequent years thus providing long-term benefit to all forces. PITO estimate that this money could reduce the service charge NPC given above by around £50 to £70 million over the life of the project.

These figures compare with the Government plans for police spending to increase by £186 million in 1999–2000 and further increases for 2000–01 and 2001–02 of £199 million and £290 million respectively. It is a matter for each police authority to set its budget and for each chief constable to decide how to deploy the available resources. The Government have also relaxed the rules on capital receipts from the sales of assets giving Police Authorities the freedom to use proceeds from sales for capital investment.

Since the costs remain to be finalised, for the reasons set out, there are no final figures for the cost of the non-core services to individual police forces. PITO does have estimates but these are subject to negotiation, and are therefore liable to very significant change. Information will shortly be circulated to forces to enable them to calculate their likely potential costs for these non-core services.

Correspondence

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter sent to him on 16 June regarding Mr. Khalid Shalabi Suliman of Birkenhead. [97943]

Mrs. Roche: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 10 November 1999.

Millennium (Policing)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with chief constables in England on their planning arrangements for 31 December and 1 January 2000; and if he will make a statement. [97962]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column 682, in response to a question from the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth). My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and Ministerial colleagues met the President of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), John Evans, on 18 October to discuss the millennium readiness of the emergency services. Mr. Evans chairs the ACPO millennium co-ordinating committee which advises police forces on these issues.

Police Constables

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the constabularies of England showing *(a)* their establishments and *(b)* the numbers of constables they are short of. [98121]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The powers of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to set police force establishment levels were removed under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. It is for individual chief officers to determine the staffing requirements for each force within the overall resources available. Information on police officer strength is collected at the end of March and September. The figures for 31 March 1999 will be placed in the Library.

Future staffing levels are for chief officers to determine within the overall resources available. However, the Government are making available additional resources, in a new ring-fenced Crime Fighting Fund, to enable the police to recruit 5,000 officers, over and above those that they had otherwise planned to recruit over the next three years.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average earnings are of police constables in England, excluding the Metropolitan police. [98120]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The data to calculate the average earnings of a police constable in England are not held centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost. A police constable on appointment will, however, receive £16,635 in salary, rising to £18,612 after initial training and £19,713 on successful completion of two years probationary service. The maximum salary is £26,325, exclusive of allowances and overtime payments where appropriate.

Women's Prison (Ashford)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans and timetable for building a new women's prison at Ashford, Middlesex. [98384]

Mr. Boateng: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Casinos

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the opening hours of casinos in England and Wales. [98399]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have issued a consultation letter to interested parties regarding casino opening hours. Copies have been placed in the Library. At present, casinos must close at 4 am. We propose an extension from 4 am to 6 am (except Sundays) for casinos in England and Wales. Comments are requested by 31 January 2000.

The Gaming Act 1968 imposes restrictions on the hours that gaming establishments may open. Under section 18 of the 1968 Act, casinos must close between 4 am and 2 pm on Sundays. The hours on other days are prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State in respect of casinos in England and Wales. Under the Gaming Clubs (Hours and Charges) Regulations 1984, the opening hours of casinos are currently from 2 pm to 4 am.

The British Casino Association, which represents all casinos in Great Britain, has asked for a change in the law to allow casinos to open until 6 am on Monday to Saturday mornings.

Following consultation with the Gaming Board for Great Britain, we have agreed in principle to the proposed change. Casinos are places for late night entertainment and we see no objection to a later closing time. This change would not affect the current permitted hours during which casinos may serve alcohol—3 am in London and 2 am elsewhere.

Gaming is a reserved subject but some powers to make secondary legislation have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament, including gaming hours. The Scottish Executive is embarking on a similar exercise in respect of casinos in Scotland. We would aim to make regulations simultaneously.

Immigration and Asylum Bill

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation is taking place with carriers prior to the implementation of the passenger information provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Bill. [98400]

Mrs. Roche: We anticipate that discussions with carriers or their representatives will commence in December. The purpose of these talks will be to establish the means whereby information on passengers may be provided. We understand that some carriers may have concerns about the implications for them of the new passenger information provisions and we will endeavour to minimise as far as is possible the resource and administrative burden on them.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify the scope of the power to require carriers to provide additional information. This will be capable of requiring carriers to provide information over and above what they currently collect. However, it will not be used to require carriers to provide information to which they do not have ready access. We recognise the constraints under which industry must operate and we will work closely with them to ensure that these are properly considered against operational need.

The passenger information provisions are an important element of the intelligence led approach to the operation of the immigration control. Not only will they enable the Immigration Service to make more efficient use of its resources but they will also benefit carriers, operators and the travelling public.

Police Authorities

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total staffing levels were for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1997–98 and *(e)* 1998–99, and what the projected level is for 1999–2000 for (i) the Derbyshire Police Authority, (ii) the Leicester Police Authority, (iii) the Cheshire Police Authority, (iv) the Yorkshire Police Authority, and (v) the Surrey Police Authority, broken down into total officer strength and total civilian strength. [98291]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 10 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *590*, for the information requested on police officer numbers. The information requested on civilian strength is set out in the table.

Projected staffing figures for 1999–2000 are not held centrally. It is for individual police authorities with their chief constables to determine staffing requirements within the resources available to them.

Police Authority	*31 March 1995*	*31 March 1996*	*31 March 1997*	*31 March 1998*	*31 March 1999*
Derbyshire Police	625	656	723	787	818
Leicestershire Constabulary	680	667	755	774	802
Cheshire Constabulary	616	690	735	781	785
North Yorkshire Constabulary	508	520	520	543	541
South Yorkshire Police	1,149	1,418	1,291	1,243	1,273
West Yorkshire Police	1,965	2,037	2,234	2,304	2,216
Surrey Police	732	754	727	743	733

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government funding was received in real terms in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1997–98 and *(e)* 1998–99, and will be received in 1999–2000 by (i) the police forces in England and Wales in total, (ii) Derbyshire Police Authority, (iii) Leicester Police Authority, (iv) Cheshire Police Authority, (v) Yorkshire Police Authority and (vi) Surrey Police Authority. [98290]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is not readily available. I will write to my hon. Friend.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98225]

Mr. Straw: My Department is working towards implementing the new Government-wide target to recover a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at

least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting. My Department's approach to waste management is based on the three "R"'s with "Recovery" (i.e. recycling, composting and energy recovery) following "Reduce" and "Re-use" as the preferred options for reducing waste sent to landfill. We have set no individual targets for paper, cardboard, glass, metal, plastic and other materials, although paper is recycled in most offices and a number of Home Office sites also recycle cardboard and glass.

My Department is about to undertake pilot waste minimisation schemes in three different types of buildings on the estate with the aim of reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill.

The Prison Service has a vital role to play in reducing waste. They have recently set up a service wide waste management project. The project will identify areas where wastage can be reduced and will address the efficient and effective disposal of prison waste and the recycling of usable waste. The primary aims are to reduce the amount of prison generated waste that is sent to landfill sites and to reduce the demand and consumption of items of clothing and equipment. Recyclable materials, such as paper, cardboard, metal and plastics will be reprocessed and re-usable clothing and equipment items channelled back into the prison estate.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98205]

Mr. Straw: The Home Department currently operates a total of 1,171 vehicles. The majority of these, 759, belong to the Prison Service Agency. There are 272 petrol engine vehicles and 899 diesel engine vehicles. There are no liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) powered vehicles in the fleet as yet as there is a logistical difficulty in opting for LPG powered vehicles in view of the limited number of supply points available for a fleet of vehicles spread throughout England and Wales.

However, the Prison Service has adopted a policy that up to 70 per cent. of vehicles replaced in the financial year 2000 will be powered by either dual fuel petrol/LPG engines, or the latest high pressure direct injection diesel engines with particulate filters where available. The Home Office is planning to go out to consultation to adopt a similar policy by the end of the current year.

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has responded to the petition about deaths in custody from families of the deceased; and if he will make a statement. [98150]

Mr. Straw: I met representatives of the United Families and Friends Campaign, the authors of the petition, on 26 April this year and my officials have subsequently been in correspondence with them. I am considering the petition and will respond shortly.

Dangerous Offenders

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions he and his staff have had with Northumbria Police about present procedures for supervising discharged offenders, following the conviction of Dominic McKilligan; [98132]

(2) if he intends to give trial judges the power to extend the registration systems of the Sexual Offences Acts to convicted offenders whose offences contain a strong sexual motivation; [98131]

(3) what plans he has to impose a statutory obligation on social services departments and hospital authorities to consult statutory care agencies and the police authorities before discharging anyone from their care who may pose a known risk to the general public; [98129]

(4) if he intends to require an inter-agency risk assessment prior to release of anyone convicted of indecency with children under Schedule 1 to the Sexual Offences Act. [98130]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Protection of the public is a primary duty of the criminal justice agencies. The Government have put in place arrangements to enable risk assessment to be carried out on an inter-agency basis prior to the release of dangerous offenders, including those convicted of indecency with children. There are strong inter-agency liaison arrangements in Northumbria and throughout the country, in which the police play a major part. This work is overseen by a Steering Group on Dangerous Offenders, which includes representatives from all criminal justice agencies at very senior level. There is a support group within the Home Office, including seconded police and probation staff, which supports the Steering Group and helps local agencies with individual cases.

These Questions all arise out of the case of Dominic McKilligan, currently in custody for the rape and murder of an 11-year-old boy in 1998. A review of the work of all the agencies involved with the care and supervision of Dominic McKilligan is currently being undertaken in line with the Department of Health guidance contained in "Working Together Under the Children Act 1989—A Guide to Arrangements for Inter-Agency Co-operation for the Protection of Children from Abuse". Once it is completed the agencies concerned will consider what lessons can be drawn from this tragedy and what action is required.

The issue of judicial discretion in relation to the registration requirement in the Sex Offenders Act 1997 is one of a number of areas currently being reviewed by the Home Office. Once the review is completed, we shall then need to consider whether, and if so what, changes are necessary to improve the effectiveness of the Act.

Dangerous Cycling

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many police authority areas have police used spot fines powers to deter dangerous cycling; and if he will make a statement. [98345]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The police do not have the powers to issue fixed penalty notices for the offence of dangerous cycling. In order to assist the police to deal with inconsiderate cycling on the pavement, we

introduced from 1 August 1999 a fixed penalty for the offence of cycling on the pavement. The fixed penalty is not an on the spot fine: payment is not required on the spot and the person receiving it can challenge its issue in court.

Information about how many police forces have issued fixed penalty notices for cycling on the pavement is not yet available. Each police force has been asked to monitor the fixed penalty provisions which came into force on 1 August 1999, but the details are not likely to be available until early in the new year.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has undertaken into the Canadian police campaign of zero tolerance of domestic violence and its suitability for the United Kingdom. [98288]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Earlier this year, the Home Office published "Domestic Violence Matters: an evaluation of a development project". This reported on a pilot domestic violence project in Islington, adapted from a scheme in London, Ontario. The project sought to establish a civilian crisis intervention service working with the police, promote a law enforcement response, and develop inter-agency links to encourage consistent and co-ordinated action. The report discusses current Canadian law enforcement policy in respect of domestic violence.

The Home Office has also published this year "Arresting Evidence: domestic violence and repeat victimisation" and "Policing Domestic Violence: effective organisational structures". The publications named are all available on the Home Office website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

As part of the Crime Reduction Programme's component dealing with domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, reviews have been carried out of what is known from relevant research of different aspects of domestic violence and of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different interventions. Policing was amongst the areas covered.

Electoral Register

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Consumers Association concerning the effect on social exclusion of commercial use of the electoral register. [98171]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Consumers Association wrote to my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, on 21 October about the recommendation of the Working Party on Electoral Procedures that electors should be given a choice over whether their personal details should be included in the version of the electoral register which is available for sale.

Police (London Weighting)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the value is of London weighting for *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian staff in the Metropolitan Police; what the rates were in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [98173]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Receiver for the Metropolitan Police District tells me that London weighting for police and civil staff in the Metropolitan Police over the last five years is as follows:

£ per annum

		Civil staff		
Year	*Police officers*	*Inner*	*Intermediate*	*Outer*
1994	1,398	1,776	1,015	736
1995	1,440	1,776	1,015	736
1996	1,491	1,776	1,015	736
1997	1,542	1,776	1,015	736
1998	1,605	1,776	1,015	736
1999	1,662	1,850	1,056	766
		[1]1,622	[1]828	[1]538

[1] With effect from 1 August 1999, as part of the 1999 pay settlement, £228 of London Weighting for Civil Staff has been consolidated into basic pay.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total numbers of *(a)* applications and *(b)* recruits were in each police force in each of the last three years; what the ratio was of applications to recruits per force in each year; and if he will make a statement. [98174]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The following tables show the number of applications to join the police service received by each force in each of the last three years, the numbers of appointments on probation (the most accurate assessment we have of the numbers of new recruits to the police service) for each force in the same periods and the ratio of applications to new appointments on probation.

The figures have been supplied by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. The numbers of appointments on probation differ from the number of total recruits to police forces in England and Wales which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave the hon. Member on 21 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *624*. This is because the latter include transfers between forces.

1996–97

Forces	*Police formal applications*	*Police appointments on probation*	*Ratio applications/ appointment*
Avon and Somerset	0	141	0
Bedfordshire	21	12	2
Cambridgeshire	1,099	96	11
Cheshire	829	103	8
City of London	446	42	11
Cleveland	1,393	80	17
Cumbria	1,053	74	14
Derbyshire	807	77	10
Devon and Cornwall	1,064	94	11
Dorset	377	60	6
Durham	1,343	106	13
Dyfed-Powys	573	45	13
Essex	1,241	185	7
Gloucestershire	322	60	5
Greater Manchester	2,366	345	7
Gwent	932	68	14

1996–97

Forces	Police formal applications	Police appointments on probation	Ratio applications/ appointment
Hampshire	1,797	235	8
Hertfordshire	659	126	5
Humberside	194	72	3
Kent	1,016	268	4
Lancashire	1,765	182	10
Leicestershire	962	135	7
Lincolnshire	1,236	109	11
Merseyside	41	57	1
Metropolitan Police	3,941	670	6
Norfolk	603	95	6
North Wales	316	0	0
North Yorkshire	434	63	7
Northamptonshire	469	65	7
Northumbria	1,486	177	8
Nottinghamshire	927	89	10
South Wales	2,208	152	15
South Yorkshire	1,180	200	6
Staffordshire	620	99	6
Suffolk	1,576	100	16
Surrey	543	55	10
Sussex	442	158	3
Thames Valley	1,556	183	9
Warwickshire	201	0	0
West Mercia	600	110	5
West Midlands	2,212	388	6
West Yorkshire	1,660	267	6
Wiltshire	264	20	13
England and Wales Total	42,774	5,663	8

1997–98

Forces	Police formal applications	Police appointments on probation	Ratio applications/ appointment
Avon and Somerset	621	105	6
Bedfordshire	284	46	6
Cambridgeshire	473	58	8
Cheshire	829	87	10
City of London	638	29	22
Cleveland	0	56	0
Cumbria	389	46	8
Derbyshire	612	61	10
Devon and Cornwall	1,000	172	6
Dorset	665	75	9
Durham	848	105	8
Dyfed-Powys	861	33	26
Essex	304	108	3
Gloucestershire	1,013	27	38
Greater Manchester	2,614	436	6
Gwent	308	31	10
Hampshire	929	182	5
Hertfordshire	314	63	5
Humberside	219	70	3
Kent	261	118	2
Lancashire	1,307	111	12
Leicestershire	711	115	6
Lincolnshire	1,077	36	30
Merseyside	3,064	160	19
Metropolitan Police	4,633	1,164	4
Norfolk	408	55	7
North Wales	638	63	10
North Yorkshire	607	65	9
Northamptonshire	432	52	8
Northumbria	2,044	227	9
Nottinghamshire	867	0	0
South Wales	1,654	170	10

1997–98

Forces	Police formal applications	Police appointments on probation	Ratio applications/ appointment
South Yorkshire	786	135	6
Staffordshire	1,260	220	6
Suffolk	834	69	12
Surrey	731	112	7
Sussex	2,108	136	16
Thames Valley	1,889	258	7
Warwickshire	695	54	13
West Mercia	867	62	14
West Midlands	3,272	445	7
West Yorkshire	975	182	5
Wiltshire	293	60	5
England and Wales total	44,334	5,859	8

1998–99

Forces	Police formal applications	Police appointments on probation	Ratio applications/ appointment
Avon and Somerset	1,367	90	15
Bedfordshire	503	34	15
Cambridgeshire	421	35	12
Cheshire	1,075	89	12
City of London	135	15	9
Cleveland	0	0	0
Cumbria	280	23	12
Derbyshire	591	43	14
Devon and Cornwall	590	54	11
Dorset	300	35	9
Durham	775	87	9
Dyfed-Powys	1,085	32	34
Essex	687	88	8
Gloucestershire	377	61	6
Greater Manchester	2,178	217	10
Gwent	601	53	11
Hampshire	744	116	6
Hertfordshire	653	67	10
Humberside	795	36	22
Kent	829	236	4
Lancashire	97	64	2
Leicestershire	582	85	7
Lincolnshire	0	6	0
Merseyside	1,406	133	11
Metropolitan Police	6,222	1,586	4
Norfolk	312	19	16
North Wales	543	62	9
North Yorkshire	15	17	1
Northamptonshire	259	25	10
Northumbria	1,781	234	8
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0
South Wales	1,902	165	12
South Yorkshire	745	84	9
Staffordshire	124	17	7
Suffolk	0	60	0
Surrey	594	124	5
Sussex	1,087	92	12
Thames Valley	579	144	4
Warwickshire	917	33	28
West Mercia	695	83	8
West Midlands	4,023	467	9
West Yorkshire	96	14	7
Wiltshire	130	36	4
England and Wales total	36,095	4,961	7

Police (Length of Service)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of service is per police officer *(a)* per force and *(b)* for England as a whole; and if he will make a statement. [98175]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police (Staff Costs)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total *(a)* budget and *(b)* expenditure were for police staff costs for the Metropolitan police in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [98172]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Receiver for the Metropolitan police district tells me that the budget and expenditure figures for police staff costs within the Metropolitan police over the last five years are as follows:

£.million

Year	*Budget police staffing*	*Outturn police staffing*
1994–95	949.105	947.697
1995–96	953.906	953.116
1996–97	960.911	953.352
1997–98	950.294	954.126
1998–99	968.503	969.985

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *64*, if he will detail the settlements made with the five employees of the Commission for Racial Equality with regard to their claims of racial discrimination against the Commission. [98369]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Details of individual settlements are confidential between the parties involved.

Farouk Sarraj

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his office received passports from Mr. Farouk Sarraj and his wife Haj Fadel of 5a Camper Road, Southend-on-Sea SS1 2YR with the request that they have printed on them the permanent right of residence granted by his Department in its letter dated 10 September 1973 (reference F95293), and when he intends to respond to the request. [98127]

Mrs. Roche: Mrs. Haj Fadel's passport was received in the Integrated Casework Directorate on 24 July 1999. We have asked for the recorded delivery details of a second package containing Mr. Farouk Sarraj's passport and we are trying to trace the record of receipt.

Once both passports and supporting documents have been traced they will be passed to a caseworker for urgent consideration and a decision will then be made as quickly as possible.

Siemens Contract

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government received all payments and compensation owing from Siemens for computer work at the Immigration Department before Siemens was allowed to bid for the Vehicle Inspectorate system. [98242]

Mrs. Roche: Yes. Under the terms of the contract between the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) and Siemens Business Services (SBS), the financial risk for the late delivery of elements of the IND Casework Programme is borne by SBS. In September 1998 a package of changes to the contractual payment terms—in part to compensate for expenditure wasted as a result of the delays in delivering the Information Technology application—was negotiated with SBS and all agreed compensation payments have been received when due. Details of this package are commercially confidential and disclosure would place us in breach of contract.

Special Constabulary

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people served in the special constabulary of each police force in each of the past five years for which figures are available. [89552]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[pursuant to the reply, 5 July 1999, c.330–31]:* The table setting out the number of special constables in post in each police force in England and Wales for the past five years has been revised to take account of some typographical errors in the figures given in the columns for 1996 and 1997. The figures have been further revised to take account of corrections which forces have made in their returns for 1996.

The revised table is as follows:

Force	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Avon and Somerset	651	688	759	621	547
Bedfordshire	189	189	182	186	154
Cambridgeshire	279	275	303	320	310
Cheshire	321	274	475	459	407
City of London	83	77	86	76	64
Cleveland	212	195	160	164	126
Cumbria	241	201	189	198	204
Derbyshire	434	413	428	380	317
Devon and Cornwall	1,142	1,102	1,148	1,024	918
Dorset	221	254	289	315	305
Durham	200	187	184	144	159
Dyfed-Powys	302	314	283	254	237
Essex	674	608	634	638	544
Gloucestershire	320	330	297	276	233
Greater Manchester	768	746	685	598	523
Gwent	126	136	157	119	113
Hampshire	598	564	611	698	760
Hertfordshire	320	315	297	306	238
Humberside	427	391	340	324	269
Kent	569	555	589	592	526
Lancashire	608	531	483	489	449
Leicestershire	356	360	415	406	316
Lincolnshire	322	299	271	260	216
Merseyside	384	333	401	419	458
Metropolitan Police	1,550	1,850	1,714	1,282	1,138
Norfolk	345	319	402	337	336
Northamptonshire	303	289	316	288	230
Northumbria	506	471	533	400	342
North Wales	288	332	341	358	400
North Yorkshire	381	360	362	358	276
Nottinghamshire	552	537	620	558	461

Force	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
South Wales	477	461	361	366	338
South Yorkshire	452	381	308	281	246
Staffordshire	725	702	685	595	468
Suffolk	409	407	379	397	420
Surrey	238	260	297	235	224
Sussex	527	511	472	442	393
Thames Valley	679	744	656	609	569
Warwickshire	352	340	381	345	261
West Mercia	582	613	582	512	515
West Midlands	818	897	945	889	731
West Yorkshire	777	709	690	589	559
Wiltshire	318	233	154	149	184
Total	20,026	19,753	19,864	18,256	16,484

The figures for 1995 have been supplied by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. Those for 1996–99 have been supplied by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate.

Qualified Majority Voting

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those areas of extension of qualified majority voting agreed at Tampere; and if he will list those areas where he has declared he will veto any extension. [96573]

Mr. Vaz: I have been asked to reply.

No extension of qualified majority voting was agreed at Tampere. For a statement of the Government's position on qualified majority voting I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave him on 9 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *486*.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners (Income Support)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of income support for pensioners in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and what levels of take-up are assumed, as a percentage of beneficiaries and potential expenditure. [97554]

Mr. Rooker: The current forecasts of expenditure on income support for pensioners is given in the table. I shall make an announcement on our plans for a national programme to encourage take-up of the minimum income guarantee in due course.

	£ million
1999–2000	4,033
2000–01	4,196
2001–02	4,407

Note:
These figures are consistent with the pre Budget Report 1999

Social Fund

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many benefit claimants received a social fund *(a)* grant or *(b)* loan in each of the last five years in (i) Greater London, (ii) Leaside district and (iii) Edmonton constituency; what was the total amount of (A) grant and (B) loan in (i), (ii), and (iii); and if he will make a statement. [98056]

Angela Eagle: The administration of the Social Fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Andrew Love, dated 10 November 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked Peter Mathison to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many benefit claimants received a social fund (a) grant or (b) loan in each of the last five years in (i) Greater London, (ii) Leaside district and (iii) Edmonton constituency; and what was the total amount of (A) grant and (B) loan in (i), (ii), (iii). As Mr. Mathison is currently on leave I am replying.

Although the Benefits Agency (BA) does not collate information in exactly the format you have requested, the figures available are included in the attached appendix.

The number of loans and grants awarded does not correspond to individual benefit customers, as some will have received an award more than once. We do not have information on the latter.

Data is held at district office level. BA districts do not correspond to the boroughs within Greater London. In order to answer your question, the following BA districts have been used:

Barking and Havering, Ealing, Bankside, Euston, Neasden, Newham, Thames Valley, South Circular, City East, Barnet, Leaside, Thameside, Palace, Hackney, Harrow & Hillingdon, SW Thames

Leaside district consists of Edmonton, Tottenham and Wood Green offices. Information at a sub-district or constituency level is not available and therefore, I am unable to provide information on the Edmonton area in isolation.

I hope this is helpful.

Appendix

Table 1: Number of loans and grants in Greater London

Financial year	Loans	Grants
1995–96	195,252	30,410
1996–97	187,042	27,865
1997–98	192,742	26,907
1998–99	195,376	27,576
1999–2000[1]	119,700	15,916

Table 2: Total amount spent on loans and grants in Greater London

£

Financial year	Loans	Grants
1995–96	41,637,468.90	12,015,099.65
1996–97	47,755,587.86	12,116,068.11
1997–98	54,245,234.66	12,565,912.12
1998–99	57,774,958.38	12,825,380.17
1999–2000[1]	36,496,136.56	7,516,206.48

Table 3: Number of loans and grants awards in Leaside BA district

Financial year	loans	grants
1995–96	10,800	1,572
1996–97	11,448	1,584
1997–98	13,322	1,495
1998–99	13,595	1,683
1999–2000[1]	7,722	850

Table 4: Total amount spent on loans and grants in Leaside BA district

£

Financial year	Loans	Grants
1995–96	3,173,645.26	629,846.43
1996–97	3,629,703.96	628,870.05
1997–98	4,050,184.48	633,391.42
1998–99	4,035,156.27	661,875.32
1999–2000[1]	2,841,128.38	358,111.86

[1] Figures for 1999–2000 cover the period from April to October 1999

Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which software providers have responded to Stakeholder Pension Consultation Brief 6. [98119]

Mr. Rooker: One software provider, Quality Management Software Ltd. responded to Stakeholder Pension Consultation Brief 6.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently waiting for their pension application to be processed by Newcastle Benefit Office; and when the Office expects to process applications from people who reached the age of 60 in September. [98190]

Mr. Rooker: The number of people who reached pension age (60 for a woman and 65 for a man) in September 1999 and are currently waiting for their pension application to be processed by the Benefit Agency's clerical section in Newcastle is 888. It is expected that most of this number will have been completed by 30 November.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners are not claiming the minimum income guarantee; what is the average resulting loss of income to those pensioners; and if he will make a statement. [98062]

Mr. Rooker: We estimate that the number of pensioners not claiming their Income Support entitlement is between 530,000 and 870,000. The average weekly amount unclaimed is estimated to be £18.80. We will announce our plans for a national programme to encourage take-up of the minimum income guarantee in due course.

Note:

Source Income Related benefits Estimates of Take-Up in 1997–98.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many pensioners in each of the last 10 years were in receipt of occupational and other pensions additional to the state retirement pensions and the percentage of those pensioners who were receiving *(a)* up to £10, *(b)* £10 to £20, *(c)* £20 to £50, *(d)* £50 to £100, *(e)* £100 to £200 and *(f)* over £200 per week from such sources. [98055]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Percentage of pensioners in receipt of occupational pensions

	Amount of occupational pension received (£ per week, July 1996 prices)						Total number in receipt (millions)
	Under £10	£10–20	£20–50	£50–100	£100–200	More than £200	
1987	29	19	27	14	9	2	3.8
1988	23	21	26	17	10	3	3.8
1989	23	21	25	18	11	2	4.0
1990–91	20	19	29	16	11	4	4.2
1992	17	16	26	18	16	6	4.3
1993	17	16	29	17	17	5	4.5
1994–95	14	17	28	19	15	8	4.6
1995–96	15	15	27	22	15	7	4.7
1996–97	12	13	27	22	18	9	4.5

Notes:

1. Pensioners are defined as individuals over State Pension age (65 for men, 60 for women).
2. All money amounts are expressed in £ per week at July 1996 prices.
3. All years are calendar years except 1990–91, which refers to the combined calendar years 1990 and 1991, and 1994–95 onwards, which refer to financial years.
4. Receipt of occupational pension is based on survey respondents' own assessment and may be subject to under-reporting.

Source:

Family Expenditure Survey

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate *(a)* the net cost and *(b)* the gross cost of paying SERPS to widows and widowers at (i) 100 per cent. of spouse's contributions made to 5 April 2000 and (ii) 50 per cent. of spouse's contributions made after 6 April 2000, broken down by each year from 2000 to 2020. [98091]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Gross costs of SERPS pensions for surviving spouses on the basis of 100 per cent. of pension accruals to 5 April 2000 and 50 per cent. after that date

	£ million
2000–01	60
2001–02	160
2002–03	280
2003–04	390
2004–05	500
2005–06	620
2006–07	730
2007–08	850

Gross costs of SERPS pensions for surviving spouses on the basis of 100 per cent. of pension accruals to 5 April 2000 and 50 per cent. after that date

	£ million
2008–09	970
2009–10	1,080
2010–11	1,200
2011–12	1,310
2012–13	1,420
2013–14	1,520
2014–15	1,620
2015–16	1,720
2016–17	1,810
2017–18	1,900
2018–19	1,980
2019–20	2,060
2020–21	2,130

Notes:

1. Gross costs have been provided from the Government Actuary's Department.
2. Costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million, and are in 1999–2000 prices.
3. Exact figures for net costs are not available. It is estimated that gross costs are likely to incur an offset of around 0–5 per cent. in the years up to and including 2010 and around 5–10 per cent. thereafter.
4. Estimates assume average earnings growth from 1999 onwards of 1.5 per cent. per year above prices. The State Second Pension and Welfare Reform Bill changes are not taken into account in these figures.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many meetings of the working group on Best Practice Guidelines for occupational pensions have taken place so far. [98294]

Mr. Rooker: The Best Practice Working Group met for the first time in October. Their second meeting will be in January 2000.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many inquiries *(a)* by letter, *(b)* by telephone and *(c)* in total have been received by the Benefits Agency since October 1998 on SERPS for widows and widowers after April 2000; [98093]

(2) which Benefits Agency Pensions Bulletins issued since October 1998 mention SERPS for widows and widowers after April 2000; and if he will publish them. [98095]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

The Benefits Agency has collected data on the number of inquiries received within Local Offices and the Pensions and Overseas Directorate on the changes to SERPS for widows and widowers from April 2000, since April 1999.

Number of inquiries received by letter and telephone

Month	*Inquiries received by letter*	*Inquiries received by telephone*
1999		
April	1,495	508
May	467	137
June	345	114
July	289	52
August	151	53
September	143	63
Total	2,890	927

Note:
Prior to April 1999 the data has not been collected

In addition to the data provided above the Benefits Agency Chief Executive has responded directly to 56 SERPS related inquiries since October 1998.

Since October 1998 the Benefits Agency has issued six procedural bulletins in the Pensions Bulletin series on the subject of the changes to inherited SERPS from April 2000. These are 2/99; 13/99; 16/99; 18/99; 20/99; 28/99.Benefits Agency Pensions Bulletins are not priced publications available from HMSO. However, in line with the Benefits Agency's commitment to the Open Government Code of Practice, the bulletins are in the public domain and can be viewed at Benefit Agency Local Offices.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* members of the public and *(c)* organisations have written to him since October 1998 about SERPS for widows and widowers after April 2000. [98092]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available shows that since October 1998 we have received 1,381 letters from hon. Members on this subject. Since November 1998, 834 letters have been received from organisations and members of the public.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to consult outside organisations before he publishes regulations under Clause 1 of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill relating to additional pension for widows and widowers. [98094]

Mr. Rooker: We plan to write shortly to interested organisations to invite them to be involved in a consultation group.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many meetings of the Pension Forecasting Advisory Group have taken place so far. [98293]

Mr. Rooker: The Pensions Forecasting Advisory Group met for the first time in October. Their second meeting will be in January 2000.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *310*, if in response to his Department continuing to make payments direct to lenders, lenders have undertaken under the 1991 agreement to continue not to take possession; and if the agreement relates only to cases where income support covers 100 per cent. of the mortgage interest. [98191]

Mr. Bayley: The payment of mortgage interest direct to lenders clearly reduces significantly the number of people who will fall into arrears or increase arrears that they might have had before they claimed Income Support

Mortgage Interest. The Code of Mortgage Lending practice produced by the lending industry clearly states that people with arrears will be considered sympathetically and positively.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98203]

Mr. Bayley: The Department has a fleet of 2,849 vehicles of which 506 are fuelled with petrol, 2,287 with diesel and 56 with liquid petroleum gas (LPG). There are currently 15 LPG cars on order and it is departmental policy to replace all 'pool cars' primarily operating in urban areas or other Air Quality Management Areas with diesel-fuelled LPG cars when they become due for replacement.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98229]

Mr. Bayley: The Department's approach to waste management should help us to achieve the Green Ministers' target for Government Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting, in 2000–01.

To date the following targets have been established:

Recycling of "Confidential Waste" paper—target 100 per cent.—at present 75 per cent. is being achieved.

Recycling of glass from spent fluorescent tubes—target 100 per cent.—which is being achieved.

Plans are being developed to site bottle banks for both departmental and domestic glass recycling on DSS sites. Target—to site banks on 10 per cent. of sites within 12 months.

Recycling facilities for metal waste from drink cans already exists at a number of sites. Target—to cover 10 per cent. of sites within 12 months.

Targets for the recycling of carpets and of toner cartridges are being investigated.

In addition, an Environmental Management System (EMS) is being introduced at the large DSS site at Peel Park, Preston, and a further six sites have been identified for development of EMSs from next year.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the percentage withdrawal of benefit following all work test referrals and examinations at each Benefits Agency office in Scotland for each month in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* 1999 up to the latest available month; and how many appeals against withdrawal of benefit and what percentage of such appeals were successful; [98413]

(2) what the percentage success rate was for applications for incapacity benefit at each Benefits Agency office in Scotland in each month in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* 1999 up to the latest available month; how many appeals there were against refusals: and what percentage of such appeals was successful. [98412]

Mr. Bayley: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will define the category of individuals classified as credits only in his quarterly incapacity benefit statistics; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the increased size of this group since 1995. [98278]

Mr. Bayley: Incapacity Benefit is payable to people who satisfy both the test of incapacity for the purposes of benefit entitlement and the relevant National Insurance contribution conditions. Where a person satisfies the test of incapacity but does not meet the contribution conditions, they are not entitled to Incapacity Benefit but can be awarded National Insurance credits (and may also be eligible for Income Support paid on the grounds of incapacity). Such cases are known as "Credits Only" cases.

The number of Credits Only cases has been increasing steadily since the contribution conditions were changed in 1988. The continued increase is likely to be the result of a number of social and economic factors, including changes in patterns of working.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many letters his Department has received about his proposals on incapacity benefit; and how many of these were *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against the proposals. [98148]

Mr. Bayley: The information is not available in the format requested.

We have received around 800 letters about the Incapacity Benefit changes. Around 600 of these were from Members of Parliament and around 200 were from members of the public. There is no comprehensive record of the total number received by the Department as a whole on the subject, or of the breakdown between those in favour or those against the changes.

In addition, the Department received a total of 342 responses as part of the consultation exercise on the proposals for disability reform held earlier this year. A list of those organisations and academics who responded to the Welfare Reform Green Paper, excluding those who requested confidentiality, has been placed in the House Library. The Department has also placed a summary of responses in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the communications addressed to local authorities by his Department on the administration of housing benefit since 1 January. [98299]

Angela Eagle: Details of the circulars issued by the Department to local authorities on the adjudication and operation of Housing Benefit are as follows.

HB/CTB (A) circulars (1999)

Number	*Title*	*Date issued*
A1/99	Persons who are to be treated as not liable for their housing costs	January 1999
A2/99	Change to Qualifying Conditions For Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit	January 1999
A3/99	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Subsidy Arrangements—Specific Grant for Local Authorities' Administration Costs in 1999–2000 (this circular was replaced by S2/99)	February 1999
A4/99	National Insurance Contribution Rates 1999–2000	February 1999
A5/99	Closer Working with BA—Progress Report	March 1999
A6/99	1999–2000 Income Tax Rates and Allowances	March 1999
A7/99	I. Childcare charges II. Disregards for claimants working at least 30 hours a week	March 1999
A8/99	National Minimum Wage	April 1999
A9/99	Kosovar evacuees	April 1999
A10/99	New Deal schemes and Employment Zones	May 1999
A11/99	Nursing Diploma Students—Formerly known as 'Project 2000' Nurses	May 1999
A12/99	Application of Habitual Residence Test to returning former UK residents	May 1999
A13/99	Judicial Review: Regina v Macclesfield Borough Council Housing Benefit Review Board Ex Parte Temsamani (regulation 10(6B))	May 1999
A14/99	Welfare Reform	May 1999
A15/99	Supported Accommodation: The Government announcement on 31 March 1999 to proceed with the proposals for long-term funding arrangements for supported accommodation as laid out in the consultation paper 'Supporting People: A new policy and funding framework for support services'	June 1999
A16/99	Section 19—Progress Report 1	June 1999
A17/99	Treating Non-Cash Vouchers as earnings	June 1999
A18/99	1. General information about Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC) and Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC) 2. WFTC/DPTC the 'Better off' issue	June 1999
A19/99	Educational Maintenance Allowances	July 1999
A20/99	National Savings Certificates—July 1999 rates	July 1999
A21/99	Valuation of property	July 1999
A22/99	Closer Working with BA—Progress Report	July 1999
A23/99	1. Department for Education and Employment arrangements for Student support in respect of 'new' and 'existing' students. 2. Details of changes to the disregard provisions to take account of student loans. 3. Details of the new rates of disregards and rent deductions.	July 1999
A24/99	Verification Framework—Revised Guidance On Establishing Identity	July 1999
A25/99	More information about Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC) and Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC)	July 1999
A26/99	Notional HB assessments for Crown Tenants	August 1999
A27/99	Increase in personal allowance of children under 11	August 1999
A28/99	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Policy and Housing Benefit Management contact points	August 1999
A29/99	Sports awards	August 1999
A30/99	Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD)	August 1999
A31/99	HB/CTB Guidance Manual	August 1999
A32/99	Verification Framework; Management Information (MIS)	August 1999
A33/99	Changes from 4 October to HB/CTB Extended Payments, consequential to the introduction of the Lone Parent's Benefit Run-On and the extension of the Extended Payments scheme to disabled people	August 1999
A34/99	Disapplication of section 19 (requirement to provide a national insurance number) to hostel dwellers	September 1999
A35/99	Enhanced guidance on operating the Exceptional Hardship Scheme	September 1999
A36/99	Definition of a hostel—Disapplication of section 19 (requirement to provide a national insurance number) to hostel dwellers	September 1999
A37/99	Changes to the implementation of the Verification Framework and section 19 requirement and funding	September 1999
A38/99	Confirmation of the laying of Regulations in respect of: Changes to Personal Allowances for Children and Young Persons from 4 October; Changes to Extended Payments Regulations from 4 October	September 1999
A39/99	HB/CTB Circular A23/99 notified authorities about the changes to regulations introduced by the Social Security Amendment (Students) Regulations 1999 (S.I. 1999/1935). This circular clarifies the period over which student loans should be taken into account	September 1999
A40/99	Closer Working with BA—Progress Report	September 1999
A41/99	1. Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) and Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC) 2. Changes to regulations consequential to introduction of WFTC and DPTC 3. WFTC and DPTC Publicity Material	September 1999
A42/99	General information about New Deal 50 Plus and how it effects HB/CTB	September 1999
A43/99	Effect on fast tracking of changes from 4 October to HB/CTB Extended Payments, consequential to the Lone Parent's Benefit Run-On	September 1999
A44/99	DfEE support for Further Education students, and to post-16 year old pupils in schools	October 1999
A45/99	Occupational or Personal Pensions paid to third parties	October 1999

HB/CTB (A) circulars (1999)

Number	*Title*	*Date issued*
A46/99	1. Occupiers of the home 2. Further guidance on ex-owners and definition of a company 3. Volunteers 4. Absent partner	October 1999
A47/99	Service Charges In Supported Accommodation	October 1999
A48/99	Verification Framework: further administrative simplifications, additional information and clarification	October 1999
A49/99	WFTC and DPTC: Exchange of information between Inland Revenue and local authorities	November 1999
A50/99	i) Grant and loan rates for Health Care students ii) Clarification of the changes in the way loan and dependants grants are taken into account	November 1999

National Insurance

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff who worked for the Contributions Agency before it was transferred to the Inland Revenue continue to work on national insurance in his Department. [98343]

Mr. Rooker: On 1 April 1999 responsibility for National Insurance (NI) contributions operations and policy passed from DSS to the Inland Revenue. As my hon. Friend, the then Minister of State, explained in his written answer on 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *429*, the staff working in those areas were transferred to the Inland Revenue. No Contributions Agency staff were retained in the Department to work on NI contributions matters because the Department has no residual responsibility for the collection or recording of contributions.

This Department and Inland Revenue continue to work together closely on National Insurance matters including, for example, the integrity of the National Insurance number.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 5 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *339*, concerning Benefits Agency information, if he will set out the findings and actions arising from the review. [98274]

Mr. Rooker: We are satisfied that action has been taken to ensure that the accuracy of information available to the public has been reviewed and will continue to be reviewed in the future.

Personal Service Companies

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *385*, if he will publish a list of the seven companies currently contracted to his Department to provide information technology contractor staff. [98151]

Angela Eagle: The seven companies are Ajilon, Computer People, FI Recruitment, QA Myriad, Parity Resources, Nesco and Rullion.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *385*, how many individuals trading as personal service companies are currently working for his Department and its agencies. [98152]

Angela Eagle: The Department's contractual arrangements are with the Framework companies and not the individual contractors. The Department has no information on the trading arrangements of individual contractors

Benefits (New Year)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking to ensure that vulnerable people will receive their benefits over the New Year, with particular reference to people with disabilities and those receiving direct and manual payments; and if he will make a statement. [93483]

Angela Eagle *[pursuant to her reply, 27 July 1999, c. 297–98]:* The administration of benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Tim Boswell, dated 10 November 1999:

I am writing pursuant to Peter Mathison's letter of 27 July, *Official Report*, columns *297–298*, in response to your Parliamentary Question asking what action would be taken to ensure that vulnerable people will receive their benefits over the New Year, with particular reference to people with disabilities and those receiving direct and manual payments. As Mr. Mathison is currently on leave, I am replying. Mr. Mathison's original letter contained an error, therefore, I enclose the revised text in full.

Each year the Benefit Agency (BA) brings forward the production of order books, Girocheques and Automated Credit Transfers (payment directly to bank accounts) so that people receiving direct and manual payments of benefits can have their money in advance for holiday periods when Banks and Post Offices are closed. These arrangements will again be made for people in receipt of all BA benefits, including disability benefits, for the forthcoming Christmas and New Year period.

Throughout the year, the BA has continuity planning arrangements in place which could involve manual payments being implemented where problems such as postal disruption are anticipated. In the most vulnerable cases, such payments could be issued to the customer in the office the same day. The BA will also consider sending a visiting officer to those who are unable to attend the office.

Over the Christmas and New Year period, BA local offices will not be open on Friday 24 December in England and Wales. Scottish BA offices, however, will be open on 24 December. All BA local offices will be open on 29 and 30 December, and 4 January (except in Scotland, where offices return to normal working hours on 5 January). Working hours will be advertised in the local office.

The BA also provides an out of hours service (OOHS) to help customers who find themselves in particular need outside normal office hours. On weekdays this service operates until at least 20.00 hours. At weekends and on statutory holidays, it will operate for at least six hours daily, normally between 9.00 and 20.00 hours. Contact with the OOHS is normally made through the social services or police who liaise with a central emergency officer through a telephone message service. The officer then considers the individual person's needs in consultation with outside agencies.

In addition, the BA has been aware for some time of the issues which may arise as a result of the Year 2000 date change. A full programme of work was established in 1996. Most of the major

mainframe systems (the benefit payment computer systems) hold their dates in a way which is largely unaffected by the Year 2000 problem. Nevertheless, a full regime of checking has taken place and all benefit payment systems are now fully year 2000 compliant.

Interfaces with external computer systems, including the systems which pay benefits directly to bank accounts, have been rigorously tested, or plans are in place to do so. An intensive testing process is also under way on our major benefit paying systems to provide additional assurances. For example, BA has recently concluded a business confidence review of Jobseekers Allowance and Income Support that did not identify any risks of material disruption to payments of benefits.

I apologise for any inconvenience caused by the original error and I hope this is helpful.

Child Support Agency

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on *(a)* his proposals for reform of the Child Support Agency and *(b)* the length of time of the implementation of his proposals. [97925]

Angela Eagle: Our proposals which will benefit over a million more children have received widespread support. Many people have said that they want to see the reforms implemented quickly. However, we need to make substantial changes to the legislation and to the way the CSA operates. We will not repeat the mistakes of the current scheme by rushing these changes into effect before we are ready.

Pension Rates

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the basic retirement pension rates for *(a)* a single person and *(b)* a married couple would have been in 1998–99 and 1999–2000, and would be in 2000–01, if they had been increased in April 1998, 1999 and 2000 in line with the increase in average earnings for the year to the previous September. [98414]

Mr. Rooker: The information is in the table.

£

	1998–99 rate	*1999–00 rate*	*2000–01 rate*
Single person	65.00	68.20	71.35
Married couple	103.90	109.00	114.05

Notes:

1. The rate has been calculated assuming 100 per cent. entitlement to Retirement Pension.
2. Average Earnings Index Whole Economy (non-seasonally adjusted), September on September, as published by the Office for National Statistics, have been used for the 1998–99 and 1999–2000 upratings.
3. Whole Economy Earnings—(headline rate 3 month average) at July 1999 as published by the Office for National Statistics, have been used to uprate 2000–01. The headline rate is the annual change in the average of the seasonally adjusted series over 3 months. The September 1999 index is not yet available.
4. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 pence at each uprating.

Departmental Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many targets have been agreed between his Department and (i) local authorities and (ii) other bodies apart from his own agencies and non-departmental public bodies. [98317]

Mr. Rooker: Currently, the Department has no published targets with either local authorities or other bodies apart from DSS agencies and non-departmental public bodies.

Benefits (Annual Uprating)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 5 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *341*, what assessment he has made of the practicability of the Benefits Agency's uprating plan being implemented if the annual uprating of benefits were based on the retail price index for the year to October, November or December preceding the uprating. [98425]

Mr. Rooker: I have made no such assessment.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how council tax is taken into account in the uprating of retirement pension and income support. [98426]

Mr. Rooker: Changes in Council Tax are included in RPI (all items) the index normally used to uprate Retirement pension. Changes in Council Tax are not taken into account in the Rossi index, the index normally used to uprate Income Support.

HEALTH

Road Accidents (Recovered Costs)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been recovered from insurers of those responsible for road accidents under the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Act 1999; in how many cases recovery has been achieved; and if he will make a statement. [97802]

Mr. Hutton: The Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Act 1999 came into effect on 5 April this year. From that date responsibility for the collection of charges passed from individual hospitals to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, with the Compensation Recovery Unit, a part of the Benefits Agency, acting on his behalf.

In the first six months of operation the Compensation Recovery Unit has received notification of 271,251 new claims for compensation following a road traffic accident. One third of these cases have been confirmed as involving treatment at an NHS hospital, one third have no NHS element and one third are currently being checked. This has resulted in the identification of an estimated £40m potential income for NHS trusts in England, Scotland and Wales, to be released as and when the underlying compensation claims are settled.

The Compensation Recovery Unit took delivery of a new computer system on 5 April 1999, not only to deal with NHS charge recovery but also to replace the elderly system in place for the recovery of state benefits since 1990. Technical problems with the new computer system have delayed the transfer of around two million records of claims for all types of personal injury compensation from the old system to the new. This, in turn, has delayed the collection of NHS charges in many cases where compensation has been paid since the scheme started in April.

The technical difficulties are now being overcome and the scheme is beginning to deliver significant sums of money to trusts. An initial payment was made at the end of July when 185 trusts shared £230,305. August saw an improvement to 225 trusts sharing £713,162 and, at the end of September, 230 trusts shared £1,727,942. I can now confirm that the Compensation Recovery Unit recovered, and paid to 255 trusts, a further £3.7 million at the end of October, the largest ever monthly payment to the NHS in respect of recovery following road traffic accidents. This payment significantly exceeds the amounts previously collected by trusts in an average month in 1998–99 and shows a clear trend towards the step change in income we believe the new system will deliver.

I will be making a further report on progress at the end of December and again at the end of the full financial year.

NHS Direct

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS Direct schemes are *(a)* in operation and *(b)* planned; and if he will make a statement. [97964]

Ms Stuart: There are currently thirteen NHS Direct sites in operation and the service is available to over 40 per cent. of the population of England. From early December 1999, four new sites will become operational and five of the existing sites will expand their coverage, making the service available to over 60 per cent. of the population of England. NHS Direct will be available to the whole population of England by the end of the year 2000.

Arthritis

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suffer from arthritis in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Shropshire; and if he will make a statement. [96662]

Mr. Hutton: It is estimated that between 8 and 10 million people suffer from one of the different types of arthritis in the United Kingdom. The disease strikes people of all ages but is more common in older people.

Figures are not available on the prevalence of arthritis on a county by county basis.

Dental Services

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of dentists taking only private work by region in each year since 1995. [96200]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

NHS (Funding)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the adequacy of the resources for the NHS in the current financial year. [97224]

Mr. Denham: For the current year, the National Health Service in England received an extra £2.8 billion providing real terms growth of 5.1 per cent. bringing the total net expenditure to £39.7 billion. These extra funds are allowing the NHS to deliver more responsive high quality services.

Macular Eye Disease

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans has he to introduce fast-track treatment for macular eye disease; [97356]

(2) how many people in the United Kingdom suffer from macular eye disease. [97357]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of people suffering from age-related macular degeneration is not collected centrally but I am aware of estimates made by the recently established AMD Alliance International that over half a million people in the United Kingdom have this condition. Only 10 per cent. to 15 per cent. of cases—"wet AMD"—are treatable by laser co-agulation and I am not aware that, where it is appropriate, patients are experiencing undue delay in obtaining treatment.

The extension of eligibility for free National Health Service sight tests to people aged 60 or over, introduced from April, is ensuring that more people at risk of AMD are receiving eye examinations from which patients with signs of eye disease are referred for specialist assessment.

Nursing Provision

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the increase in nursing provision for regional health authorities in England since 1 May 1997. [97358]

Mr. Hutton: The data are shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, by region in England as at 30 September each year

Wte

Area	*1997*	*1996*
England total	330,620	332,200
Anglia & Oxford	32,040	32,310
North Thames	46,920	46,710
North West	49,300	49,740
Northern & Yorkshire	45,030	44,870
South & West	41,850	42,100
South Thames	42,680	42,250
Trent	34,760	34,930
West Midlands	34,200	35,400
SHAs and others	3,840	3,880

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts. Figures exclude learners and agency staff. 'hc' indicates number. 19,300 nursing and midwifery training commissions are planned for 1999–2000, an increase of 4,000 over three years. Because of the time lag in completing training, this increase is not reflected in the workforce data

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of nurses *(a)* in the NHS and *(b)* at York District Hospital. [97795]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of nurses are shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, in England as at 30 September 1998

	hc[1]	wte[2]
England Total	421,750	332,200
York Health Services NHS Trust	2,080	1,600

[1] 'hc' indicates number
[2] 'Wte' indicates whole time equivalent
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten
2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts
3. Figures exclude learners and agency staff
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Epilepsy

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the incidence of epilepsy *(a)* amongst those aged (i) under 16 years, (ii) 16 to 60 years, and (iii) over 60 years, and *(b)* in total in the most recent year for which figures are available. [97470]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available in the format requested.

Age	Approximate incidence per 100,000
Under 19	60
Between 25 and 29	90
Between 35 and 39	80
Between 45 and 49	60
Between 65 and 69	87
Over 80	159

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of funding targeted by his Department on *(a)* the treatment of epilepsy and *(b)* research into epilepsy during 1999. [97469]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not available in the format requested.

It is for health authorities and Primary Care Groups to plan and arrange the services available to people in their care. However, complex epilepsy is included in the comprehensive list of specialised services in the Health Service Commissioning in the New National Health Service. This means that regional offices will need to give special consideration to commissioning services for people with complex epilepsy.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the science and engineering base. In 1998–99 the MRC spent £3.6 million researching epilepsy. The MRC also fund a considerable amount of basic research in the area, (e.g. on nerve function and damage) which is not included in this figure.

Head Lice

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a list of those health authorities that provide bug-busting kits for head lice free of charge. [97648]

Mr. Hutton: This information requested is not collected centrally.

Long-Term Care

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 October 1999, *Official Report*, column *752*, on residential accommodation for elderly people, what representations his Department has received on the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Long-Term Care for the Elderly; and if he will make public a summary of representations received. [97563]

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations from *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals he has received on the subject of long-term care since the publication of the Royal Commission's report. [97382]

Mr. Hutton: A large number of representations to Ministers on a variety of issues make reference to long-term care. Some representations specifically focus on the Royal Commission's report; around 250 letters have been received from hon. Members and around 70 letters have been received from organisations since the report was published earlier this year. Around a further 430 letters have been received direct from members of the public. Many of the representations have been broadly in support of the main recommendations in the Royal Commission's majority report; others have criticised the recommendations and some have put forward alternative proposals.

Diabetic Screening

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the advice of the UK Screening Committee on the feasibility of introducing high risk type 2 diabetic screening. [97649]

Mr. Hutton: The United Kingdom National Screening Committee is considering the case for introducing a screening programme targeted at people at high risk of type 2 diabetes. We expect to receive the Committee's advice later next year. In England, this work will be linked in to the National Service Framework for diabetes.

Acne

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if laser treatment to deal with acne scarring is currently available on the NHS. [97952]

Mr. Hutton: Laser treatment to deal with acne scarring is a new procedure which is currently being clinically evaluated. It is not yet therefore generally available in the United Kingdom.

NHS Laboratory Technicians

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the career structure for laboratory technicians in the NHS. [97818]

Mr. Denham: On 15 February 1999, the Health Departments published proposals for modernising the National Health Service pay system in "Agenda for Change". Initial discussions with NHS trade unions on pay modernisation resulted in a Joint Framework of Principles and Agreed Statement on the Way Forward which was published on 8 October. Negotiations continue, aiming for a pay system which pays fairly for work done, with career progression based on responsibility, competence and satisfactory performance.

Motor Neurone Disease

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of funding targeted by his Department on *(a)* the treatment of motor neurone disease and *(b)* research into motor neurone disease during 1999. [97790]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not available in the format requested. It is for health authorities and Primary Care Groups to plan and arrange the services available to people in their care.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the science and engineering base.

The MRC funding for grants relating to motor neurone disease or to the function of motor neurones in general was almost £640,000 in 1998–99. The MRC also fund a considerable amount of basic underpinning research in the area such as nerve function and damage which is not included in this figure.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of funding targeted by his Department on *(a)* the treatment of multiple sclerosis and *(b)* research into multiple sclerosis during 1999. [97788]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not available in the format requested. It is for health authorities and Primary Care Groups to plan and arrange the services available to people in their care. However, complex multiple sclerosis is included in the comprehensive list of specialised services in the Health Service Commissioning in the new National Health Service. This means that regional offices will need to give special consideration to commissioning services for people with complex multiple sclerosis.

The Medical Research Council (MRC)—which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the science and engineering base. The MRC spent approximately £640,000 in 1998–99. The MRC also fund a considerable amount of basic underpinning research in the area such as nerve function and damage which is not included in this figure.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the incidence of multiple sclerosis *(a)* among those aged (i) under 16 years, (ii) 16 to 60 years and (iii) over 60 years, and *(b)* in total, in the most recent years for which figures are available. [97789]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the Multiple Sclerosis Society states that multiple sclerosis is estimated to affect between 80–90,000 people in the United Kingdom.

Population	*New cases per year (incidence)*	*Total number of cases (prevalence)*
England (approx. 50m)	4 per 100,000 (2,000)	100 per 100,000 (50,000)
Under 16	2.5 per cent. of all new cases (50)	50
Over 60	2.5 per cent. of all new cases (50)	12,500
Over 70	Very few	3,750

These figures are derived from epidemiological research studies. These studies all give slightly different figures. The table provides current best estimates for England. NHS figures do not provide accurate estimates of the epidemiology of MS. This is because many patients are not admitted to hospital and outpatient diagnostic data is not comprehensive.

Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS Trust and Health Authority appointments which were not made by the due date and which remained outstanding on 1 November. [98110]

Ms Stuart: The appointment terms of 265 National Health Service trust non-executives and Chairs came to an end on 31 October 1999. Appointments were made to 257 or 97 per cent. of these vacancies at least four weeks before the due date. Fourteen of these appointments were short-term reappointments until January 2000. Eight vacancies were outstanding on 1 November 1999. They were:

Body	*Number of Chairs*	*Number of non-executives*
Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	0	1
Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust	0	2
Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare	0	1
Queen Victoria Hospital	0	1
Two Shires Ambulance	0	1
Medway	0	1
Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust	0	1
Total	0	8

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98217]

Yvette Cooper: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Dominic McKilligan

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the health authority inquiry into the discharge, supervision and later conviction for murder of Dominic McKilligan to be complete; what were the terms of reference of that inquiry; and whether those conducting that inquiry can insist on the cooperation of local authority social services departments. [98133]

Mr. Hutton: The Health authority has commissioned under Health Service Guidance 94/27, an inquiry into the services which Dominic McKilligan received from the National Health Service. That inquiry has an independent panel and work is underway. Although the inquiry cannot insist on the co-operation of the social services departments, information has been sought from involved local authorities. The inquiry aims to complete its work early in the new year.

The report of the inquiry will be made available to the independently chaired case review which is also being undertaken on behalf of Newcastle Area Child Protection Committee under Part 8 of "Working Together under the Children Act 1989" which has a wider remit in that it will be considering all the services involved.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer of 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 845, concerning beta interferon, if he will convey to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam the results of his inquiries into the case of Mrs. Josephine Timms. [98275]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the final version of the Health Service circular on beta interferon. [98381]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is currently considering all comments received during the consultation on a draft circular on beta interferon.

Eastbourne Hospital

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of nursing staff at Eastbourne District General Hospital; and if he will make a statement. [97326]

Mr. Denham: The East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority and Eastbourne Hospitals National Health Service Trust have reviewed nursing levels and it has been agreed that funding will be allocated for an additional 10 nurses at Eastbourne District General Hospital.

Following the recommendation in the South East NHS Executive's recent Review of Nursing at Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust, the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority, Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust and Eastbourne Downs Primary Care Group are also looking to agree a workload measurement tool that will help determine the skill mix and staffing required to deliver appropriate care at Eastbourne District General Hospital.

Electric Wheelchairs (East Sussex)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many electric wheelchairs were issued or paid for by Eastbourne and County Healthcare Trust in each of the last three years. [98195]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is given in the table.

Financial year	*Number issued*
April 1996-March 1997	0
April 1997-March 1998	22
April 1998-March 1999	13

Figures given in the table are the number of electric wheelchairs issued by Eastbourne and County Healthcare National Health Service Trust.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase funding for electric wheelchairs in East Sussex; and if he will make a statement. [98196]

Mr. Hutton: Wheelchair services for residents of East Sussex are provided by Eastbourne and County Healthcare National Health Service Trust and Hastings and Rother NHS Trust.

Eastbourne and County Healthcare NHS Trust are presently discussing with Eastbourne Downs Primary Care Group the possibility of increasing funding for Electrically Powered Indoor Chairs. Hastings and Rother NHS Trust will shortly be considering increasing funding for Electrically Powered Indoor Chairs. Any increases in funding will be dependent on local priorities.

Benzodiazepine

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new born babies in each of the last five years have been damaged by the prescribing of benzodiazepine drugs to their mothers. [93726]

Yvette Cooper: Information on the number of babies born to mothers taking benzodiazepines during pregnancy who have congenital abnormalities or experience complications is not available. The number of congenital abnormalities and neonatal complications reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines through the United Kingdom's spontaneous Adverse Drug Reaction Scheme from 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1997 suspected as associated with benzodiazepines is shown in the table.

Number of suspected adverse reaction reports of congenital anomalies and neonatal complications associated with benzodiazepines

Year	*Number*
1994	0
1995	0
1996	1
1997	5
1998	2

A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug as factors such as underlying disease and concomitant medication may be contributory. The level of reporting of adverse drug reactions with particular drugs is influenced by the scale of drug usage, the period of time the drug has been on the market and the publicity about the drug.

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to request the Medicines Control Agency to review the use and prescription of benzodiazepine drugs. [93722]

Yvette Cooper: It is not the role of the Medicines Control Agency to advise on the prescription of medicines. Advice has already been issued in 1998 by the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Department of Health.

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the advice of the Committee on Review of Medicines that benzodiazepines should not be prescribed to pregnant women. [93724]

Yvette Cooper: The product information for prescribers states that benzodiazepines should not be given during pregnancy unless there are compelling medical reasons. There are however some medical conditions in pregnancy where the use of these drugs can be life-saving to mother and child, for example when used to control fits in eclampsia. Patient Information Leaflets produced by the manufacturer and authorised by the licensing authority for benzodiazepines carry warnings that patients should not take the medicine if they are pregnant, might become pregnant or are breast feeding.

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the advice of the Committee on Review of Medicines on the prescription of benzodiazepine drugs. [93725]

Yvette Cooper: In 1980, the Committee on Review of Medicines recommended the short-term use only of benzodiazepines, and the addition of warnings about withdrawal reactions and advice on gradual reduction in dosage on cessation of therapy. The licences for benzodiazepines were amended to add these recommendations for use at this time and this was reflected in the product information for health professionals.

Subsequently the Committee on Safety of Medicines has given advice on the use of benzodiazepines. Doctors were informed in the bulletin, "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in 1988. This advice is found in the British National Formulary, which the Department provides to all doctors and pharmacists twice a year.

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to carry out research into the effects of long-term use of benzodiazepine drugs. [93723]

Yvette Cooper: There are no plans to carry out research into the long term use of benzodiazepine drugs. The Medicines Control Agency continually monitors the safety of all medicines in routine clinical practice. Benzodiazepines are currently licensed for short-term use only.

CABINET OFFICE

Concordat (Wales)

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when she expects to publish the bilateral Concordat between the Cabinet Office and the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales. [98356]

Marjorie Mowlam: I am pleased to announce that the First Secretary and I have agreed the text of the Concordat between the Cabinet Office and the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales. Copies of the Concordat have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and the text will be available on the Cabinet Office website.

Concordat (Scotland)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when she expects to publish the bilateral Concordat between the Cabinet Office and the Scottish Administration. [98353]

Marjorie Mowlam: I am pleased to announce that the First Minister and I have agreed the text of the Concordat between the Cabinet Office and the Scottish Administration. Copies of the Concordat have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and the text will be available on the Cabinet Office website.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much her Department spent on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years. [97423]

Marjorie Mowlam: My Department's expenditure on external consultants and advisers in each of the last four financial years is given as follows:

£

Year	*Expenditure on external consultants and advisers*
1995–96	5,015,495
1996–97	4,708,290
1997–98	2,820,726
1998–99	5,534,507

Note:
The increase from 1997–98 to 1998–99 is largely because of new expenditure in the following areas: GCHQ consultancy services (CESG) by Central IT Unit (£1,483,858); combating the Millennium Bug expenditure by Y2K team (£502,956); and the Peoples Panel by Modernising Public Services Group (£451,812).

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by her Department and its agencies; and if she will make a statement. [98216]

Mr. Stringer: My Department's approach to waste management is based on the three Rs: with Recovery (ie. recycling, composting and energy recovery) following Reduce and Re-use as the preferred options for reducing waste sent to landfill. This should help us to achieve: the Green Ministers' target for Government

Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting in 2000–01, as published in "Greening Government: First Annual Report of the Green Ministers Committee 1998–99". We are developing individual targets for paper, cardboard, glass, metal, plastic and other materials. Our associate bodies are similarly working towards the Green Ministers target.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many proposals to impose new regulations on business have been dropped as a result of the application of Regulatory Impact Assessment. [98049]

Marjorie Mowlam: Regulatory Impact Assessment is an iterative process that begins when policy options are first explored. During the development of a proposal, options may be dropped for various reasons, including the potential burden on business. But information is not collected on proposals that are dropped and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Proposals that come before Parliament, and which are accompanied by a final, published Regulatory Impact Assessment have been judged to be necessary and to strike the right balance between cost and benefit.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate she has made of the costs *(a)* reduced and *(b)* avoided as a result of the use of Regulatory Impact Assessments for the last year for which figures are available. [98043]

Marjorie Mowlam: I have made no such estimates. Regulatory Impact Assessments show the expected costs and benefits of proposals that are brought forward. These individual assessments are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Where a new proposal has the benefit of replacing an earlier more costly arrangement, that would be shown in the relevant Regulatory Impact Assessment.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make it her policy to encourage *(a)* utility and *(b)* other sector regulators to adopt the principles contained in her Department's Regulatory Impact Assessment guidelines in respect of their regulatory decisions. [98051]

Marjorie Mowlam: The requirements of the Better Regulation Guide and Regulatory Impact Assessment apply primarily to Government Departments and agencies who bring regulations before Parliament. It is also appropriate for other agencies such as utility and other sector regulators where they do not already have such guidance built into their statutory requirements.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will set *(a)* departmental and *(b)* overall targets for reducing the burden of regulation, measured by (i) volume of regulatory requirements and (ii) costs imposed by those requirements. [98550]

Marjorie Mowlam: The volume and cost of regulation is less important than its quality and effectiveness. To focus on the number of regulations or their cost is meaningless because it ignores the benefits to business, society and the environment that can result from targeted and proportionate regulation.

The process of Regulatory Impact Assessment aims to ensure that the costs of regulation are justified by the benefits.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what procedures are in place to ensure that departments comply with the Cabinet Office Regulatory Impact Assessment guidelines. [98089]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Procedure for compliance is in the form of ministerial agreement that regulatory proposals with an impact on businesses, charities or voluntary bodies should have a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) prior to collective agreement being sought. Departments consult the Cabinet Office Regulatory Impact Unit as part of this process.

Ministers and their Departmental Regulatory Impact Units have responsibility for ensuring that RIAs are published and placed in the Libraries of the House. Copies of all final RIAs must also be sent to Cabinet Office Regulatory Impact Unit.

Financial Services and Markets Bill

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will take steps to require that the requirement set out in Clause 125 of the Financial Services and Markets Bill should apply to all sector regulators in respect of their regulatory decision-making role; and if she will make a statement. [98088]

Marjorie Mowlam: There is no need to extend the specific requirements on consultation and cost benefit analysis, in Clause 125 of the Financial Services and Markets Bill, to all sector regulators. Best practice guidance on consultation and on Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is already available to sector regulators in the Better Regulation Guide.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will instruct the Anti-drugs Co-ordinator to include within the remit of the drugs action teams the problem of drugs and driving. [98116]

Marjorie Mowlam: The issue of drugs and driving is predominantly a matter for the police, who have powers to deal with drivers who are impaired through the effects of drugs under existing road traffic legislation. Drug Action Team (DAT) membership includes chief officers of agencies—including the police—which have responsibility for tackling all aspects of the drug problem, and as such this issue is already covered by DATs.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many special advisers are employed by each Government Department, including the Prime Minister's Office; and how many there were in 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99. [97766]

Marjorie Mowlam: For the numbers of Special Advisers currently in post, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his question 98192.

The information requested for earlier years is as follows:

Year	*Number of Advisers*
1995–96	38
1996–97	38
1997–98	70
1998–99	72

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the special advisers currently employed by each Government Department, including the Prime Minister's Office, and their previous employment. [98192]

Marjorie Mowlam: For details of the Special Advisers employed in the Prime Minister's Office, I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on 25 June 1999, *Official Report,* columns *478–80.* Since then, he has appointed Bob Bartram, Ed Richards and Catherine Rimmer. Special Advisers appointed by me and other Cabinet colleagues are as follows:

Department	*Special Advisers*
Chief Whip	Ian McKenzie Sue Jackson
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Kieran Simpson
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport	Jack Thurston Andy Burnham
Secretary of State for Defence	Alasdair McGowan
Secretary of State for Education and Employment[1]	Conor Ryan
	Sophie Linden[4] Tom Engel[4] Nick Pearce
Deputy Prime Minister	Joe Irvin Paul Hackett[4] Joan Hammell Adrian Long
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	David Clark
	Andrew Hood
Secretary of State for Health	Simon Stevens Darren Murphy
Secretary of State for the Home Department	Ed Owen
	Justin Russell
Lord Chancellor	Garry Hart
Secretary of State for International Development	David Mepham
	Dee Sullivan
Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women	Clare Cozens
	Jo Gibbons
Minister for the Cabinet Office[2]	Nigel Warner Andrew Lappin
President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons	Sheila Watson
	Nicci Russell
Secretary of State for Scotland	Richard Olszewski Michael Elrick Prof. Mike Donnelly[5]
Secretary of State for Social Security	Andrew Maugham Elsbeth Johnson
President of the Board of Trade	Dan Corry Jo Moore[4]
Chancellor of the Exchequer[3]	Ed Balls[6] Ian Austin
Chief Secretary	Spencer Livermore Ed Miliband
Secretary of State for Wales	Professor Hywel Francis

[1] In addition, Professor Michael Barber has been appointed as the Standards and Effectiveness Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

[2] In addition, the Minister for the Cabinet Office has appointed Keith Hellawell as the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator and Michael Trace as the Deputy UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator on special adviser terms.

[3] In addition, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has appointed Chris Wales, Paul Gregg and Shriti Vadera as Members of the Council of Economic Advisers.

[4] Part-time.

[5] Part-time and unpaid.

[6] Chief Economic Adviser.

Details about an individual's previous employment are confidential in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what is the total cost of special advisers currently employed by each Government department and by the Prime Minister's Office; and what was the total cost for each year from 1995–96 to 1998–99. [97606]

Marjorie Mowlam: The costs of Special Advisers within each department are confidential in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

The estimated cost in 1999–2000 of Special Advisers in No.10 is £1.5m. The estimated cost of departmental Advisers is £2.4m.

The total costs of Special Advisers in the years requested are as follows:

1995–96 £1.5m
1996–97 £1.8m
1997–98 £2.6m
1998–99 £3.5m

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what is the total number of vehicles used by her Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans she has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98197]

Mr. Stringer: The information requested is as set out and covers the vehicles owned by the Cabinet Office, its five agencies and the Central Office of Information (CoI).

	Number
Vehicles fuelled by petrol	159
Vehicles fuelled by diesel[1]	76
Vehicles fuelled by lPG[2]	35
Vehicles fuelled by other energy sources	1
Total	271

[1] Includes vehicles fuelled by low-sulphur diesel
[2] Includes bi-fuelled vehicles

Some 242 of these vehicles are operated by the Government Car and Despatch Agency, which runs two fleets, the Government Car Service and the InterDespatch Service.

The Cabinet Office, its Agencies and the CoI are, individually, either implementing a replacement programme or investigating the scope for making greater use of alternative technologies and fuels, including liquid petroleum gas, for the vehicles they operate.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Financial Crime

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Solicitor-General what arrangements the Serious Fraud Office will make with the Financial Services Authority to ensure the effective enforcement of the criminal law in cases of financial crime. [97842]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office and the Financial Services Authority, together with the Crown Prosecution Service, the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland, the Crown Office in Scotland, the Department of Trade and Industry, Her Majesty's Treasury and the Police are working to develop guidelines for deciding who should take the lead in investigating particular instances of suspected financial misconduct and for liaison both on a regular basis and during investigations and subsequent regulatory, civil or criminal action. It is proposed to publish these guidelines when they have been finalised.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Solicitor-General what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98226]

The Solicitor-General: The Law Officers' Departments are working towards the Green Ministers' target for Government Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting, in 2000–01.

Towards this target, the Crown Prosecution Service has in place contracts for the collection, shredding and recycling of over 80 per cent. of classified waste paper, and is presently tendering a contract for the recycling of non-classified waste paper, cardboard, metal, glass and plastic. The Disposal Sales Agency is used by the CPS to dispose of information technology and other obsolete equipment either by sale or recycling.

The Crown Prosecution Service, Serious Fraud Office, Treasury Solicitor's Department and Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers seek to reduce the amount of waste produced and to deal with waste by re-use, recycling, composting or incineration to produce heat and power in preference to landfill.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Solicitor-General what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98199]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General and Treasury Solicitor use cars allocated by the Government Car Service. Details of their fuel types are provided in an answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 11 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *828*.

The Serious Fraud Office does not operate motor vehicles of any kind.

The Crown Prosecution Service operates a total of 21 vans and estate cars which are based at various locations throughout England and Wales. Of these one is fuelled by petrol and the remaining 20 run on diesel. The CPS periodically review the local availability of liquid petroleum gas with the aim of moving to this form of fuel as soon as practicable.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Digital Licence Fee

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received about the proposal for a digital licence fee from commercial broadcasters who were responding to the Davies Committee recommendations on the future funding of the BBC. [95113]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of Dome ticket sales to date have been *(a)* via the internet, *(b)* via lottery terminals, *(c)* to tour operators and *(d)* to overseas purchasers. [95134]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on emergency services at the Millennium Dome. [95123]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 October 1999]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the use to which the Millennium Dome will be put after the millennium celebrations are completed. [97190]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 10 November 1999, *Official Report*, columns *622–23*.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what proposals for the content of the Millennium Dome were received by the NMEC from the National Book Committee; and what response they received from *(a)* the NMEC and *(b)* Ministers; [94689]

(2) if he will list *(a)* the cost, *(b)* the questions and *(c)* the conclusions of opinion research commissioned by the NMEC, distinguishing between (i) focus group research and (ii) other research. [94690]

Janet Anderson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Drug Testing (Sport)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures he is planning to ensure an effective drug-testing regime for UK sportsmen and sportswomen. [95900]

Kate Hoey *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

BBC (Funding)

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received regarding the future funding of the BBC; and if he will publish the results of the consultation. [97557]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will publish a list of assets sold by his Department and the value realised in each case, in each year from 1991–92 to 1998–99, together with an estimate of the value of asset sales planned in the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial year. [97585]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

National Stadium

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) who was responsible for authorising the original design brief for the new National Stadium; [97981]

(2) what recent representations he has received from *(a)* the British Olympic Association and *(b)* other sporting bodies regarding the proposed capacity of the new National Stadium; and what response he has made; [97980]

(3) if the Sport England Lottery grant for the development of the new National Stadium was conditional on the inclusion of an athletics facility; [97983]

(4) what assessment he has made of the implications of seating capacity options at the new National Stadium for the likely success of a future bid to host the Olympic Games in the United Kingdom; [97984]

(5) what requirements regarding seating capacity for track and field events were contained in the original design brief for the new National Stadium; [97982]

(6) if he will make a statement on what seating capacity options for the new National Stadium have been considered by his Department. [97986]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

TV Transmission

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimates he has made for the time when analogue television transmission will be discontinued, of the percentage of *(a)* the viewers of BBC1 who will have access to analogue but not digital equipment in their homes and *(b)* the viewers of S4C who will have access to analogue but not digital equipment in their homes. [97953]

Janet Anderson: The Government have set two tests to be met before switch over from analogue to digital television transmissions: first, at least everyone who currently receives analogue television signals should be able to receive digital signals; and second, digital receiving equipment should be affordable, so that at least 95 per cent. of UK consumers have access to digital equipment in the home. We believe that switch over could start to happen as early as 2006 and be completed by 2010.

The broadcasters estimate that 98.3 per cent. of the Welsh population have access to analogue terrestrial television services, with BBC Wales and S4C available to 97.6 per cent., and we will seek to ensure that at least the same proportion can receive television services in digital form in advance of switch over. At present, BBC Wales' and S4C's digital terrestrial services can be received by

70 per cent. of Welsh consumers and the ITC, BBC and digital broadcasters will be planning the development of terrestrial coverage over the next few years.

The BBC and S4C already transmit their services, throughout Wales, on digital satellite and they plan to broadcast on digital cable, when it becomes available.

SkyTV

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement in respect of his policy towards the percentage of home-produced material broadcast on SkyTV. [97590]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 November 1999]:* In line with all EU broadcasters, BSkyB has an obligation to comply with the requirements of articles 4 and 5 of the Broadcasting Directive so far as European and independently produced content is concerned. Sky has committed itself to steadily increasing the amount of UK produced material both in its general channels and in new ones. Sky One is this year aiming to have 50 per cent. UK content during prime time and 40 per cent. European content overall, and will spend £20 million in original home-produced production. Sky Pictures annually produces 10 films to be shown on Sky Premier, plus 40 hours of original drama and up to 40 hours of comedy. In addition, Sky sport channels, with 20,000 hours of programming each year, have a majority of home produced material. Sky News and Sky Sports News contain nearly 100 per cent. home produced material.

Sports Scholarships

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many sports are currently supporting scholarships in higher and further education; and if he will list them. [97993]

Kate Hoey *[holding answer 10 November 1999]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Stonehenge

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if people using the proposed new visitors' centre at Stonehenge who are *(a)* members of English Heritage, *(b)* members of the National Trust, *(c)* members of the National Trust for Scotland and *(d)* local people exercising their right of free access to the stones will be charged for (i) car parking (ii) access to the visitors' centre and (iii) access to the stones. [98047]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Stonehenge Master Plan sets out clearly that access to the Stones and the wider World Heritage Site will be free for all and that free transport will be provided from the visitor centre to the drop off point. The information pack circulated to bidders stipulates that they should provide free parking for: local residents with existing arrangements and for members of English Heritage and the National Trust. This includes members of other heritage organisations, such as the National Trust for Scotland, which have reciprocal arrangements. Proposed arrangements for admission to the Visitor Centre will be assessed in considering the final submissions received from bidders.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98210]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98220]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Targets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many targets have been agreed since May 1997 between his Department and (i) local authorities and (ii) other bodies apart from his own agencies and non-departmental public bodies. [98319]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Press Releases

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will break down the press releases issued by his Department in the past 12 months by broad departmental responsibility. [98147]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Museums Challenge Fund

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 5 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *362*, what sums will be provided in 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 to pre-eminent regional collections through the Designated Museums Challenge Fund. [98239]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Millennium Experience (Tickets)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many Millennium Experience tickets have been sold to date in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each of the English regions. [98126]

Janet Anderson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Prorogation. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Television Licence Fees

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what representations he has received from the BBC about the system of funding television licence fees by direct payment from the Department of Social Security; and if he will make a statement; [98377]

(2) what safeguards exist to prevent transfer of ownership of televisions to people aged 75 years or over in households where there are people younger than 75 years in order to avoid payment of the television licence fee; [98372]

(3) what estimate he has made of net revenue in each of the next five years which may be lost to the BBC as a result of proposals to introduce a free television licence fee to people aged 75 years and over; [98374]

(4) what discussions he had with the BBC about proposals to introduce a free television licence fee for people aged 75 years and over; [98375]

(5) what estimate he has made of the percentage of BBC television licence fee revenues which will be funded by the Department of Social Security following the introduction of free television licences for people aged 75 years and over; [98376]

(6) what discussions he had with *(a)* HM Treasury and *(b)* the Department of Social Security prior to the announcement of proposals to introduce a free television licence fee for people aged 75 years and over. [98373]

Janet Anderson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed the proposal for free television licences for people aged 75 or over with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer prior to the announcement. The Government have received no representations from the BBC on this proposal. Officials from my Department, the Treasury and the Department of Social Security are discussing with BBC officials the detailed implementation of the concession, including funding issues.

The estimated cost of the concession in the first full year is around £290 million, or approximately 12.5 per cent. of current television licence fee revenue. Costs in subsequent years will depend on the level of the licence fee and on increases in the number of households including a person aged 75 or over. Since the concession will be available to people over the age of 75, regardless of the age of other members of their household, ownership of television sets will not be at issue.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Feed

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date UKREP officials from his Department were informed that human and animal waste, and meat and bonemeal were being used in French animal feed; and if he will make a statement. [96015]

Mr. Vaz: As Minister responsible for Europe, I have been asked to reply.

UKREP Brussels officials first became aware of these allegations when they surfaced in the media in June.

Subsequent contact between the UK and the Commission was pursued by officials in the Joint Food Safety and Standards Group of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health. I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 5 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *374*.

Officials in UKREP Brussels received a copy of the Commission's report of its inspection mission to France on 22 October.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department first learned of the inclusion of sewage sludge in animal feedstuffs. [97571]

Ms Quin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) on 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *461*.

Quarantine

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what support measures he plans to introduce for quarantine kennel owners during the transition period before the introduction of the pet travel scheme. [97377]

Ms Quin: We have no plans for any such support measures for quarantine kennel owners.

Brownfield Land

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if land, which has been used within the horticultural industry with buildings thereon but where agricultural rates have been paid, falls within his definition of brownfield land. [98333]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

It does not.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many badger road casualties have been tested for bovine TB in each month since testing re-started. [96068]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 November 1999]:* The number of casualty badgers tested in 1999 is given in the following table:

1999	*Number*
January	72
February	184
March	196
April	139
May	128
June	107
July	101
August	41

Testing is currently suspended while facilities are upgraded in line with Health and Safety Executive recommendations. We expect to resume testing next year.

Beef on the Bone

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of *(a)* the legality of maintaining the ban on beef on the bone in England and *(b)* the scientific advice he has received on the subject. [95272]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* The Beef Bones Regulations 1997 were properly made under the powers of the Food Safety Act 1990 and remain in force throughout Great Britain until revoked.

My right hon. Friend the Minister considered carefully the advice given to him by the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Donaldson, in his report of 30 July 1999, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. The Government have made clear they wish to lift the beef on the bone ban but consider that it would be preferable to do so at the same time in all parts of the United Kingdom. Further scientific evidence on this issue is scheduled for later this month. Provided that evidence is favourable, it is the Government's clear and firm intention, and that of the First Minister in Scotland and the First Secretary in Wales, to lift the ban throughout the United Kingdom.

Common Agricultural Policy Administration

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to address the lack of a business or communication strategy identified in the Coopers and Lybrand review of Common Agricultural Policy administration. [97674]

Ms Quin: In its Business Plan for 1999–2000, published in May 1999, my Department set out its aims, objectives and targets, including objective 6 on CAP administration. The Plan sets out the context of this work, the key challenges, the MAFF programmes which contribute to it and the targets and output and performance measures which apply. These targets and other issues are also communicated through the Public Service Agreement, the Output and Performance Analyses and the Departmental Report.

Plans and targets are being communicated internally to help ensure that staff at all levels know what their work unit is about and are clear on their role and responsibilities within it. This forms part of the Department's Internal Communications Strategy, established in July 1998 following consultation with staff. The Strategy is currently being reviewed to ensure that it continues to meet the Department's business needs.

Correspondence

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to reply to the letter of 1 September from Mr. Robert Persey, a constituent of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, concerning human sewage sludge in French pig and poultry feed. [98181]

Ms Quin: My noble Friend the Minister of State replied on 8 November 1999 to the hon. Member's letter of 1 September on behalf of Mr. Robert Persey.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to reply to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury's letter dated 10 August on the subject of the pesticides tax. [95721]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 October 1999]:* My noble Friend the Minister of State replied to the hon. Member on 25 October 1999.

BSE Inquiry

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the conclusions of the BSE Inquiry conducted by Lord Justice Phillips to be published. [97698]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 November 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 8 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *459*.

GM Oilseed Rape

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if *(a)* honey and *(b)* other food, food ingredients or additives containing GM oilseed rape are permitted lawfully to be sold in the United Kingdom. [96713]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 2 November 1999]:* The European Commission, in response to questions from the European Parliament, has advised that honey that contains trace amounts (0.005 per cent.) of pollen from genetically modified crops is not classified as a novel food, and may therefore be lawfully sold throughout the Community.

As far as GM foods, food ingredients or additives derived from oilseed rape are concerned, only one GM variety currently has clearance to be marketed for this purpose. This variety does not however have the necessary authorisation to enable it to be grown commercially in the Community at the present time. It can therefore only be imported for processing.

Specified Risk Material

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to adopt the specified risk material disposal system as utilised by the French Government. [97813]

Ms Quin: I assume that the question relates to the methods permitted for removing the spinal cord from the carcases of sheep which at the time of slaughter had at least one permanent incisor tooth or were aged over twelve months. In France, the spinal cord of such sheep may be removed either by longitudinally splitting the whole vertebral column, as required in the UK, or by a method which involves suction from the unsplit carcase.

Methods involving suction have been evaluated in the UK but did not prove to be reliable in removing the entire spinal cord in all cases. It is also not possible to verify that no spinal cord remains in an unsplit carcase. We therefore have no current plans to adopt this method.

Beef Ban

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure the German ban on British beef is lifted quickly; and if he will make a statement. [97792]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend the Minister has been assured by the German Health Minister that the German Government are taking the necessary legal steps to lift the ban via the appropriate constitutional procedures which involve discussions with the Länder whose agreement is needed to lift the ban. The recent Scientific Steering Committee Opinion should make it clear to the Länder that British beef exports are safe.

Less-favoured Areas

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will consult with the agricultural industry on the options available to the Government in relation to the future of less-favoured areas under Agenda 2000. [97811]

Ms Quin: We issued a consultation paper, setting out proposals for England, on 5 November. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House and the document may be found on the internet at http://www.maff.gov.uk/farm/agendatwo/agendatwo.htm.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times Ministers in his Department met members and officials of the United States Government between 1 May 1997 and 31 December 1997; and if he will list the *(a)* dates, *(b)* locations, *(c)* Ministers involved and *(d)* names of the US members and officials at each meeting. [93947]

Mr. Robin Cook: Foreign Office Ministers have frequent contact with members of the US Administration in the United States, in the UK and elsewhere overseas. Between 1 May 1997 and 31 December 1997, the FCO Ministers listed have visited the United States and have had bilateral meetings with their approximate US counterparts as follows:

Dates	*Location*	*Minister*	*US counterpart*
18–19 May	Washington	Foreign Secretary	William Cohen, Secretary of Defense Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State Sandy Berger, Deputy National Security Adviser
21–22 July	Washington	Mr. Lloyd	John Shattuck, Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, State Department Ted McNamara, Assistant Secretary for Pol-Mil Affairs, State Department Tom Pickering, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, State Department John Kornblum, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, State Department Mac McLarty, Special Envoy to the President for the Americas Tim Wirth, Under Secretary for Global Affairs, State Department John Holum, Director for Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
25–16 November	Washington	Mr. Fatchett	Martin Indyk, Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs, State Department Dennis Ross, Special Mid East Envoy, State Department

I also met Mrs. Albright on a number of other occasions in the UK and in the margins of international meetings, and received her as my guest at Chevening on 27 December. I also had bilateral meetings with Mrs. Albright during the G8 Summit in Denver in June 1997 and at the UN General Assembly in New York in September 1997.Unfortunately, the information the hon. Member requires on meetings which have taken place in the UK and third countries is not held centrally, and to obtain it would incur disproportionate costs.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times Ministers in his Department have met members and officials of the US Government since 2 March; and if he will list the *(a)* dates, *(b)* locations, *(c)* Ministers involved and *(d)* names of the US members and officials at each meeting. [93946]

Mr. Robin Cook: Foreign Office Ministers have frequent contact with members of the US Administration in the United States, in the UK and elsewhere overseas. Since 2 March, the FCO Ministers listed have visited the United States and have had bilateral meetings with their approximate US counterparts as follows:

Dates	Location	Minister	US counterpart
24–25 March	Washington	Baroness Symons	Paul Virtue, General Counsel, Immigration and Naturalization Service Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State Stuart Eizenstat, Under Secretary for Economics, Agriculture and Business Affairs, State Department Marc Grossman, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, State Department Peter Romero, Acting Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, State Department Harold Koh, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, State Department
22–26 April	Washington	Foreign Secretary	Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State
20–21 May	Washington	Foreign Secretary	Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State Sandy Berger, National Security Adviser James Rubin, Spokesman, State Department Tony Wayne, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs
7–8 July	Washington	Mr. Hoon	Susan Rice, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, State Department Ken Lieberthal, Senior Director for Asian Affairs, NSC Stanley Roth, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, State Department Dennis Ross, Special Middle East Co-ordinator, State Department Bruce Riedel, Senior Director for Near East and South Asia Affairs, State Department Karl Inderfurth, Assistant Secretary for South Asia Affairs, State Department Martin Indyk, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, State Department
4–6 October	Washington	Baroness Scotland	Mark Schneider, Assistant Administrator, US Administration for International Development Jim Gadsden, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Canadian Affairs, State Department Bryan Samuel, Acting Assistant Secretary for Economics, Business and Agricultural Affairs, State Department Peter Romero, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, State Department Gary Vest, Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Environmental Security Arturo Valenzuela, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Inter American Affairs, NSC Governor Buddy Mackay, President's Special Envoy for the Americas, NSC

I also met Mrs. Albright on a number of other occasions in the UK and in the margins of other international meetings, including the UN General Assembly in New York in September and receiving her as my guest at Chevening on 6 March.

Unfortunately, the information the hon. Member requires on meetings which have taken place in the UK and third countries is not held centrally, and to obtain it would incur disproportionate costs.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the titles of the in-house publications and newsletters which were produced for the staff of his Department, excluding non-departmental public bodies and agencies, in the last five years, specifying the dates on which each title was first produced, the frequency with which each title is produced and the current secrecy classification of each title. [93842]

Mr. Hain: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Land Mines

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to advance a more comprehensive ban on mines in international law. [94643]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list EC legislation in progress since 1 May 1997 based on Article 235 of the Treaty of Rome as amended; and what is his policy towards use of this article as a basis for legislation. [95542]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Foreign Policy Centre

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the purpose of the establishment of the Foreign Policy Centre; and what criteria will be applied to judge its success annually. [97146]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Foreign Policy Centre is independent of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and has received no money from the Department. The purpose of its establishment and the criteria for judging its success are matters for the Foreign Policy Centre.

College of Diplomacy

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the establishment of a college of diplomacy of the European Union. [97524]

Mr. Hain: There is no proposal from the UK or other EU member states to create a European Union College of Diplomacy. We continue to co-operate with our EU

partners in the provision of joint training programmes where such training will give our officials the skills and knowledge to promote British national interests in the European Union. These programmes are in addition to our own national programmes.

ASSIST Programme

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what has been the cost of training, provided under the ASSIST programme, *(a)* in total and *(b)* to China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Croatia, Russia and Turkey; [97511]

(2) how many personnel have benefited from training, provided under the ASSIST programme, *(a)* in total and *(b)* from China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Croatia, Russia and Turkey; [97512]

(3) what has been the content of ASSIST training courses provided to personnel from *(a)* China, *(b)* Malaysia, *(c)* Pakistan, *(d)* Nigeria, *(e)* Croatia, *(f)* Russia and *(g)* Turkey; [97514]

(4) which NGOs have been involved in compiling ASSIST training courses for *(a)* China, *(b)* Malaysia, *(c)* Pakistan, *(d)* Nigeria, *(e)* Croatia, *(f)* Russia and *(g)* Turkey. [97513]

Mr. Vaz: The content of ASSIST training programmes provided to personnel from *(a)* China, *(b)* Malaysia, *(c)* Pakistan, *(d)* Nigeria, *(e)* Croatia, *(f)* Russia and *(g)* Turkey has been:

Training for senior police offices both in the United Kingdom and in-country to increase understanding of the political, social and economic context of policing;

In-country training for policemen on the rights of women and children and prevention of child trafficking;

Courses for military officers in early, middle and late career aimed at improving awareness of the operation of the armed forces in a democracy; the teaching of defence and international affairs set firmly within the context of democratic and constitutional principles, including the rule of law;

Technical courses designed to enhance the capacity of armed forces to participate in peacekeeping operations;

Training for military academy lecturers in the management of armed forces in a democracy;

Workshops on Conscientious Objection, and providing guest speakers for conferences on the military and democracy.

NGOs which have been involved in compiling ASSIST training courses for these countries (at *a-g*) are: Save the Children Fund, UNAIDS, Barry and Martin Trust, The Centre for Peacekeeping and Community Development, The Movement Against Violence.

The total cost of training provided under the ASSIST programme is £12,866,807. And to China £76,064; Malaysia £278,750; Pakistan £389,945; Nigeria £4,000; Croatia £38,696; Russia £95,386; Turkey £53,917.

In total, 664 personnel have benefited from training provided in the United Kingdom under the ASSIST programme. And from China—26; Malaysia—12; Pakistan—15; Nigeria—0; Croatia—27; Russia—16; Turkey—0.

Immigration (DNA Tests)

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of immigration cases required DNA tests to prove family relationships in each of the last three years. [97577]

Mr. Vaz: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Hoon) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward) on 29 June 1999, *Official Report*, column *118*.

"The Raspberry Ice Cream War"

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many copies of the European Commission booklet, "The Raspberry Ice Cream War", were printed in *(a)* English and *(b)* other Community languages; what determined these numbers; and if he will make a statement. [97764]

Mr. Vaz: This is a matter for the Commission. No copies of the booklet were distributed in the UK.

EMU and EU (Public Opinion)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what opinion research his Department has commissioned on attitudes to economic and monetary union and the European Union; which polling organisations have been awarded contracts for such research; when such contracts were awarded; and what the costs of such contracts have been. [97768]

Mr. Vaz: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Prime Minister gave to him on 1 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *5*.

Mr. Mark Davey

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *125*, what progress has been made in obtaining the report of the Nigerian police on the death of Mr. Mark Davey in April 1998. [97956]

Mr. Hain: The British High Commission in Lagos and Abuja continue to press the Nigerian authorities both in writing and verbally for a copy of the complete police report.

Minority and Regional Languages

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to sign the Council of Europe Charter on Minority and Regional Languages. [97883]

Mr. Vaz: It is our firm intention to sign the charter. We will move to signing and ratification as soon as the full implications for the UK are clear.

Correspondence

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to reply to the letter sent to him on 12 July regarding Dr. Amin of Birkenhead. [97944]

Mr. Vaz: A member of the Migration and Visa correspondence Unit sent my right hon. Friend a reply to his letter on 27 October. A reply was sent on 10 August but, regrettably, incorrectly addressed. I apologise to my right hon. Friend for the administrative error. He is of course at liberty to discuss this matter with me if he wishes to do so.

Chinese Embassy, Belgrade

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the total amounts paid in compensation for the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade to *(a)* the Government of the People's Republic of China and *(b)* individuals in the People's Republic of China. [96144]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to the right hon. Member shortly.

Intergovernmental Conference

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to report on preparations for enlargement of the EU at the next Intergovernmental Conference. [97924]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Minke Whale

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Norwegian Government on the resumption of Minke whale hunting by Norwegian whalers. [98085]

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not made any recent personal representations to the Norwegian Government about Minke whale hunting. However, we take every suitable opportunity to make clear to Norway the UK's views on whaling.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's current assessment of the political situation in Sri Lanka. [98060]

Mr. Hain: We believe a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka can only be reached through a political settlement. We have made clear that we stand ready to help in the resolution of the conflict if both sides ask us to play a role.

Greek Cypriots

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the authorities in the north of Cyprus regarding the situation of the Greek Cypriot community; and if he will make a statement. [98058]

Mr. Vaz: We have regular contacts with the Turkish Cypriot authorities and continue to urge them to implement measures to improve living conditions for the Greek Cypriot community in northern Cyprus. Measures were taken in October last year to relax some of the restrictions on the Greek Cypriot community, and we consider these a step in the right direction. But we have made clear that more should be done.

Arms Exports

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the value of armaments exports to *(a)* Greece, *(b)* Turkey and *(c)* Cyprus in each of the last 10 years; on what occasions a licence for the export of arms to each country was refused during that time; and if he will make a statement. [98061]

Mr. Vaz: HM Customs and Excise collect and compile information on the trading of goods between UK and other countries. However, extracting and quality assuring some of the information requested could be done only at disproportionate cost. This relates to exports before 1997.

Information on the value of military equipment exported during 1997 and 1998 and countries of destination can be found in the Government Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls for 1997 and 1998 respectively.

Export licence refusals for the last 10 years are recorded by the DTI. This information is not immediately available but the DTI have undertaken to write to me with full details as soon as possible.

All defence exports for all destinations are considered on a case by case basis against national criteria announced by the Secretary of State in July 1997 and, since June 1998, the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports. Exports to Cyprus are additionally assessed against guidelines announced by the previous administration on 14 February 1997, *Official Report*, column 282.

Chechnya

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the Government have taken to assist in the relief of the refugee crisis in Chechnya. [98311]

Mr. Vaz: We have provided £0.5 million in response to the Red Cross' emergency appeal. The EU has also 1.2 million euro available for humanitarian assistance. We and our partners have pressed the Russians to allow free movement across the Chechen/Ingush border of those fleeing the fighting, to allow access by international humanitarian missions, and to support the rapid, secure and reliable distribution of international aid.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures the Government have taken to persuade the Russian Government to seek a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Chechnya. [98312]

Mr. Vaz: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister urged Russian Prime Minister Putin to seek a political solution when he wrote to him on 4 November. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reinforced this message when he spoke to the Russian Foreign Minister on 6 November. The EU General Affairs Council on 15–16 November, and the OSCE Summit on 17–18 November, will be further opportunities to press the Russians on this.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of his Department are deployed in the United Kingdom's mission to the WTO in Geneva; and what are (i) the personnel costs and (ii) the office costs of maintaining them. [98234]

Mr. Hain: Five members of the United Kingdom's mission to the UN and other International Organisations in Geneva are employed fully or partly on WTO. The personnel cost for these staff (including accommodation and support staff costs) is approximately £550,000 per annum. The Office costs are difficult to calculate as they are bound up with the overall costs of UKMis Geneva and the UK's other two diplomatic missions in Geneva which are all co-located.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of vehicles used by his Department and its agencies fuelled by *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* liquid petroleum gas; and what plans he has to increase the rate of conversion of those vehicles to liquid petroleum gas. [98206]

Mr. Battle: The information is as follows:

Overseas

There are currently 1,235 vehicles in use at our overseas Posts. A breakdown of the fuel types used is shown below:

Fuel type	*Number of vehicles fuelled*
Petrol	514
Diesel	347
Unknown	374
Total	1,235

Detailed information about the fuel types to be chosen for replacement vehicles to be purchased at FCO Posts overseas is not known. In each case this will depend on the type of vehicle required, and the availability of fuel types at the time of purchase.

The choice of the best fuel type for each new vehicle is decided by each Post, based on any local legislation, the type of vehicle required and what fuel types are available locally. (Not all countries are able to offer unleaded petrol and supplies of either petrol or diesel can in some places be contaminated, of poor quality, or subject to irregular supply).

Posts are aware of the need to use the most environmentally friendly fuels available, where this is practical.

UK

There are currently 47 vehicles in the UK fleet.

	Fuel type	
	Petrol	*Diesel*
Cars	10	5
Vans	2	24
Lorries	—	6

LPG vehicles are currently being evaluated. One vehicle will be introduced to the London Mail Van fleet in the year 2000.

Departmental Waste

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to set targets for the recycling of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* cardboard, *(c)* glass, *(d)* metal, *(e)* plastic and *(f)* other products created by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [98224]

Mr. Battle: My Department's approach to waste management is based on the three "R"s, with "Recovery" (i.e. recycling, composting and energy recovery) following "Reduce" and "Re-use" as the preferred options for reducing waste sent to landfill. This should help us achieve the Green Ministers' target for Government Departments of recovering a minimum of 40 per cent. of total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting, in 2000–01, as published in "Greening Government: First Annual Report of the Green Ministers Committee 1998–99". We are currently undergoing an environmental audit which will set baselines against which individual recycling targets may be set. Our associate bodies will be setting their own targets to help us achieve the corporate target.

Kosovo

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the timing of the release of funds allocated by international institutions for stability and reconstruction work in Kosovo in respect of their effectiveness; and if he will make a statement. [98097]

Mr. Vaz: We have been working in the EU and with other international organisations to ensure assistance is delivered to those in need in Kosovo. A programme for Reconstruction and Recovery in Kosovo will be discussed at the second international donors meeting on Kosovo, on 17 November. We shall continue to work to ensure that funds are released in an appropriate and timely way.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects for continued operation of power stations in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [98098]

Mr. Vaz: British Trade International assess the overall power situation in Kosovo at present as poor, with frequent power outages. The main reason for this is because the two power stations are old and have been inadequately maintained for many years. There has been no war damage to either power station. A British management team, jointly funded by the EU Task Force and British Trade International, is currently working with the EU Task Force, UNMIK and the Kosovo Electric Company to manage the situation.

The period between now and the end of November, when we expect one of the power stations to become operational again following essential maintenance, may well prove difficult. There have also been difficulties maintaining a regular supply of consumables, funded by the EU Task Force, required to keep the power stations operating. However, DfID and British Trade International are now both providing funds for the hire of bulldozers until new machines funded by the Dutch Ministry of Development arrive. This will ensure that the coal supply to the power stations can be maintained.

Danish and Norwegian programmes are repairing the high voltage transmissions systems and the ability to import what power is available from neighbouring grid systems should be improved by the end of December.

DfID is working on the low voltage distribution system to ensure that essential services are maintained through the winter period. Our infrastructure engineering unit staff are heavily involved in co-ordination of the power sector to ensure that donor work is complementary.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the number of revenge attacks on *(a)* gypsies and *(b)* Jews in Kosovo since September. [98268]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the FBI about the number of bodies found in mass graves in Kosovo. [98263]

Mr. Vaz: The FCO has not received any reports on this subject from the FBI. National forensic teams who have been working in Kosovo are submitting their reports to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on attacks by ethnic Albanians on Serbs who have stayed in Kosovo; [98265]

(2) if he will make a statement on UN reaction to the grenade attack on Sunday 7 November on the Serb village of Pasjane; [98266]

(3) how many villagers from Ulastica are under arrest; and for what alleged crimes. [98267]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason the UK rejected the Iraqi appeal to halt patrols over the no-fly zone on the day of the solar eclipse on 11 August. [98277]

Mr. Hain: We remain fully committed to patrolling the no-fly zones set up to limit Baghdad's repression of the Iraqi population. We are not prepared to leave innocent civilians exposed to attacks by the Iraqi air force. Our patrolling poses no threat to those on the ground. Only when Iraqi forces try to shoot down our aircraft are we forced to respond in self-defence. Civilian facilities would, of course, never be targeted.

Stability Pact (Yugoslavia)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the terms of reference of the Stability Pact in relation to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; what objectives it is designed to achieve; how it is organised; where is the Secretariat; and who are its signatories. [98264]

Mr. Vaz: The Stability Pact for South-East Europe aims to promote peace, stability and democracy in the region. The Pact brings together the countries of the region, the EU, the USA, Russia, a range of other countries, many international organisations and International Financial Institutions. The participating countries to the Pact adopted the founding document in Cologne on 10 June 1999. It has been stressed at all Stability Pact meetings that there is a role for the FRY when conditions permit. Meanwhile, Montenegro is fully involved in the Pact's work.

The Office of the Special Co-ordinator for the Pact is in Brussels. The Special Co-ordinator Chairs the Regional Table of the Pact. This acts as a steering board and facilitates co-ordination and information exchange between the Pact's three Working Tables. The three Working Tables deal with Democracy/Human Rights, Economic Reconstruction/Development/Co-operation, and Security Issues and meet every 3–4 months. Between these meetings work is taken forward through subject-specific Task Forces.

Ukraine

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the barriers to *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU investment and trade with the Ukraine; what (i) formal meetings and (ii) programmes and initiatives have been introduced to overcome such barriers; and if he will make a statement. [98005]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions since May 1997 the British Ambassador to Ukraine held formal meetings with *(a)* the President, *(b)* the Prime Minister and *(c)* other ministers in Ukraine's Government; and on what occasions Ukraine's Ambassador to the UK has had meetings with Government ministers. [98006]

Mr. Vaz: The British Ambassador in Kiev has had two formal meetings with the Ukrainian President and 20 formal meetings with Ukrainian Ministers since taking up his post in May 1999. He has not had a formal meeting with the Prime Minister. There is no comprehensive record of the meetings which the previous Ambassador had with the President, Prime Minister and Minsters.

The Ukrainian Ambassador to the United Kingdom has had a number of formal meetings with United Kingdom Government Ministers since May 1997, including five meetings with Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers this year:

Baroness Symons (10 February), Ms Quin (14 June), Mr. Lloyd (29 June), Mr. Hain (16 September) and Mr. Hoon (21 September).

The Ambassador was also present when the Ukrainian Foreign Minister called on the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 1 February 1999 and on 20 March. The Ambassador has had two meetings with Ministry of Defence Ministers this year:

Lord Gilbert (23 March) and Mr. Spellar (6 September).

Comprehensive information on the Ukrainian Ambassador's meetings is not held centrally. To provide a full answer to this question would incur disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* staffing levels and *(b)* budget spent by the British Council in Ukraine in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [98002]

Mr. Hain: The staffing levels in Ukraine in each of the past five years was as follows:

Year	*Number of staff*
1995–96	44.5
1996–97	45
1997–98	51
1998–99	51
1999–2000	60

The amount of the grant-in-aid spent by the Council in Ukraine during this period was:

Year	*£ million*
1995–96	1.0
1996–97	1.0
1997–98	1.0
1998–99	1.1
1999–2000	1.0

Additional amounts earned from running programmes and contract work, and spent for the benefit of Ukraine over this period were:

Year	*£ million*
1995–96	0.1
1996–97	0.1
1997–98	0.8
1998–99	0.5
1999–2000	0.7

The British Council makes a substantial contribution to meeting FCO objectives in Ukraine, particularly in the field of governance and human rights, in support of reform and development and in contributing to the reform of the Ukrainian education system, including the updating of English language teaching. To accommodate its expanding activities it will shortly move into larger premises, which it will share with the Goethe Institute.

Departmental Language Skills

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department collates on the foreign language skills of staff in diplomatic service grades. [98003]

Mr. Hain: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Horses (Transportation)

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Governments of Eastern European countries regarding the transportation of horses to the European Union. [98364]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

EU Pavilions

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost to date of running EU pavilions at international exhibitions; what was the function of these pavilions; how many staff were involved; what was the pertinent budget line; and if he will list (i) display titles, (ii) videos and (iii) publications present. [97526]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

International Criminal Court (Scotland)

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive about the amendments to Scots law needed to enable the ratification of the Treaty on the International Criminal Court. [98427]

Mr. Hain: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the amendments to Scots law needed to enable the ratification of the Treaty on the International Criminal Court. [98428]

Mr. Hain: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Biological Weapons

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* his assessment of the threat from biological weapons to international security and *(b)* the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards early completion of the negotiations for an effective protocol to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention to enable the protocol to be signed at a conference in London during 2000. [98329]

Mr. Hain: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

HOUSE OF COMMONS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD) ● 1998-99

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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